ALIENS™
VS.
PREDATOR™
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WAR

ALIENS™ VS. PREDATOR™ WAR

PART 1

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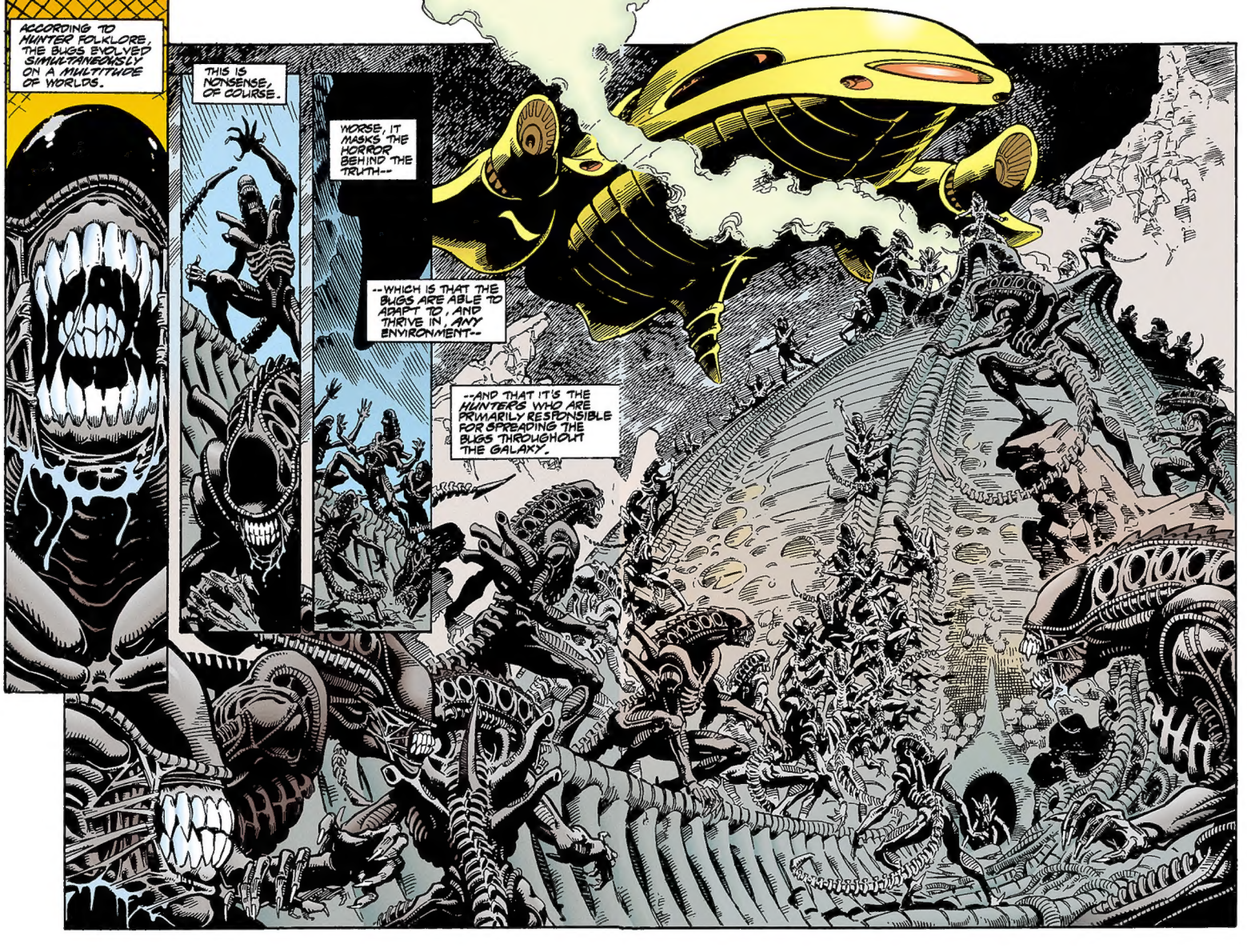
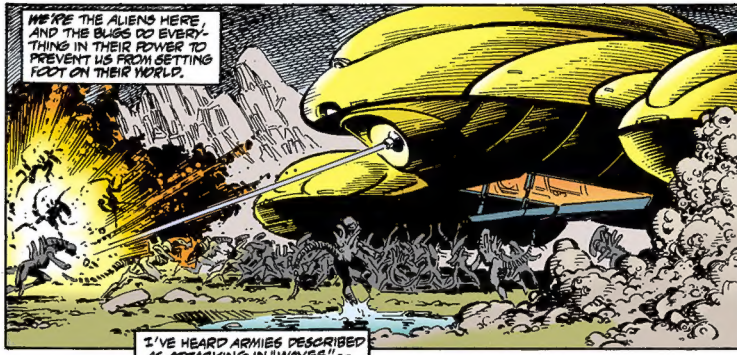
ANOTHER WORLD DOMINATED BY THE BUGS.


ACCORDING TO HUNTER FOLKLORE, THE BUGS EVOLVED SIMULTANEOUSLY ON A MULTITUDE OF WORLDS.
THIS IS NONSENSE, OF COURSE.
WORSE, IT MASKS THE HORROR BEHIND THE TRUTH--
--WHICH IS THAT THE BUGS ARE ABLE TO ADAPT TO, AND THRIVE IN, ANY ENVIRONMENT--
--AND THAT IT'S THE HUNTERS WHO ARE PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR SPREADING THE BUGS THROUGHOUT THE GALAXY.

THIS WORLD ABOUNDS WITH POTENTIAL. WATER IS PLENTIFUL, THE ATMOSPHERE IS CAPABLE OF SUPPORTING LIFE, AND THE TEMPERATURE IS STABLE, THOUGH COLD BY HUNTER STANDARDS.
THE BUGS WOULDN'T CARE IF IT WAS HOT AND DUSTY WITH NOTHING BUT CHLORINE TO BREATHE.
INSIDE THE SHIP, THE HEAT RISES TO MEET THE TENSION LEVEL AS THE HUNTERS ADJUST THE THERMOSTATS ON THEIR BODY MESH.
TOPKNOT GIVES THE "READY" SIGNAL.
WHETHER THE BUGS WERE PUT HERE INTENTIONALLY, OR IF THEIR PRESENCE IS THE RESULT OF THE KIND OF ACCIDENT THAT OCCURRED ON RYUSHI, I DON'T KNOW.
IT DOESN'T MATTER. THIS WORLD BELONGS TO THEM NOW.

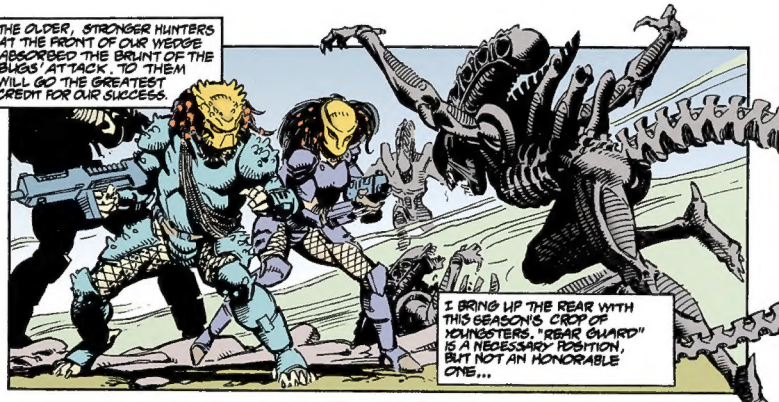

WE'RE THE ALIENS HERE, AND THE BUGS DO EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO PREVENT US FROM SETTING FOOT ON THEIR WORLD.

I'VE HEARD ARMIES DESCRIBED AS ATTACKING IN "WAVES"--SOLDIERS CHARGING AN OBJECTIVE LIKE BREAKERS STRIKING THE SHORELINE.

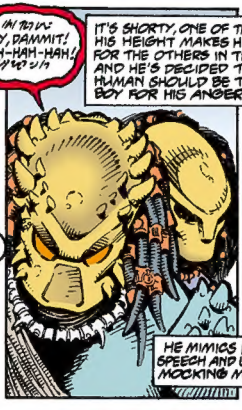
THIS IS NOTHING LIKE THAT.
THERE ARE NO LULLS BETWEEN "WAVES" OF ATTACKERS. THEIR ATTACK IS A SINGLE WAVE--A TSUNAMI OF NEEDLE TEETH, RAZOR CLAWS, AND SICKLE TAILS.

FOR THIS EXPEDITION, THE RITUAL LAWS OF MATCHING THE QUARRY WEAPON FOR WEAPON ARE SUSPENDED. PLASMA-CASTERS AND LASERS REPLACE THE NAGINATAS AND SCATTER GUNS PRESCRIBED FOR HUNTING BUGS.
THIS IS NO HUNTING TRIP--THIS IS WAR!
THERE ARE NO RULES IN WAR--ONLY OBJECTIVES.

OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO ENTER THE BUGS' HIVE...
...CLAIM OUR PRIZE...
...AND RETURN TO OUR SHIP.
THE BUGS' OBJECTIVE IS TO STOP US.
THEY FAIL.

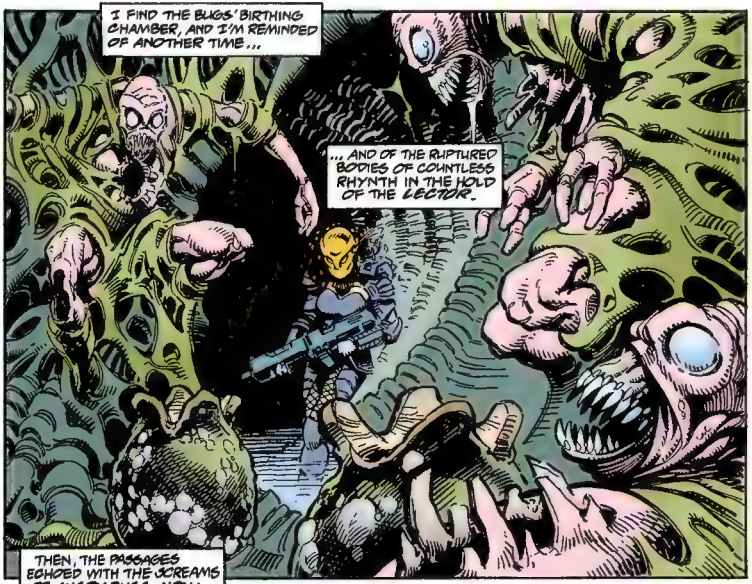

THE OLDER, STRONGER HUNTERS AT THE FRONT OF OUR WEDGE ABSORBED THE BRUNT OF THE BUGS' ATTACK. TO THEM WILL GO THE GREATEST CREDIT FOR OUR SUCCESS.
I BRING UP THE REAR WITH THIS SEASON'S CROP OF YOUNGSTERS. "REAR GUARD" IS A NECESSARY POSITION, BUT NOT AN HONORABLE ONE...

...AND COMPETITION FOR KILLS IS FIERCE.
HEY! DAMMIT!


HEY, DAMMIT! HAH-HAH-HAH!
IT'S SHORTY, ONE OF THE NOVICES. HIS HEIGHT MAKES HIM A TARGET FOR THE OTHERS IN THE CASTE, AND HE'S DECIDED THE "TOKEN" HUMAN SHOULD BE THE WHIPPING BOY FOR HIS ANGER.
HAH-HAH! HAH-HAH!
HE MIMICS HUMAN SPEECH AND LAUGHTER, MOCKING ME.

LET HIM LAUGH. HE'LL DISCOVER SOON ENOUGH THAT...
...WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND.

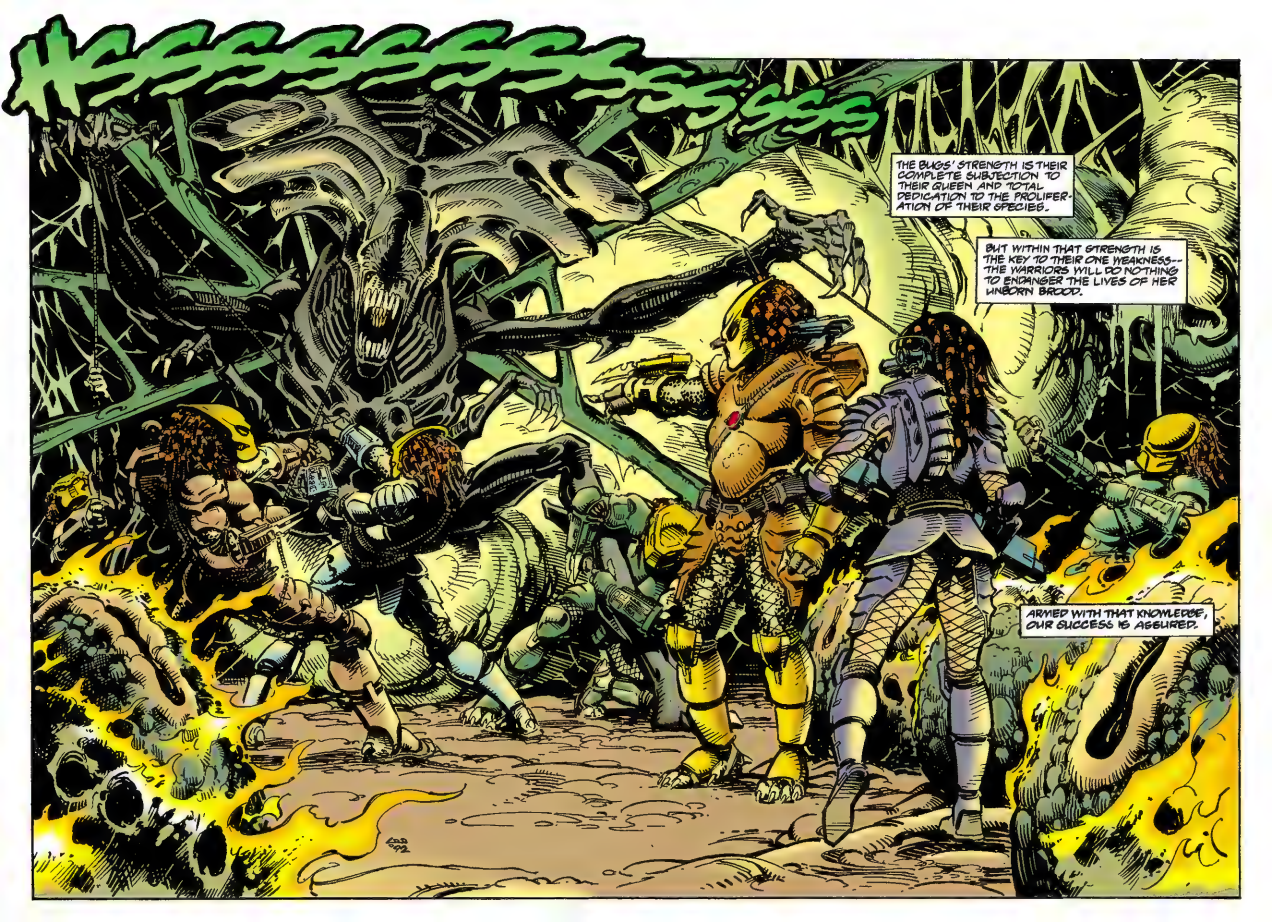
SHORTY REALIZES, TOO LATE, THAT HE'S SCREWED UP.
I WAIT FOR IT TO SINK IN HOW BADLY HE'S SCREWED UP...
...THEN I DO THE WORST THING I CAN POSSIBLY DO TO HIM...
I SAVE HIS LIFE.
NOT ONLY HAS HE BEEN DENIED AN "HONORABLE" DEATH IN BATTLE, BUT I'VE SHAMED HIM IN FRONT OF HIS PEERS.
HA-HA-HA!
SHORTY WON'T LAUGH AT ME ANYMORE, BUT I'LL HAVE TO WATCH MY BACK.


I FIND THE BUGS' BIRTHING CHAMBER, AND I'M REMINDED OF ANOTHER TIME...
...AND OF THE RUPTURED BODIES OF COUNTLESS RHYNTH IN THE HOLD OF THE *LECTOR*.

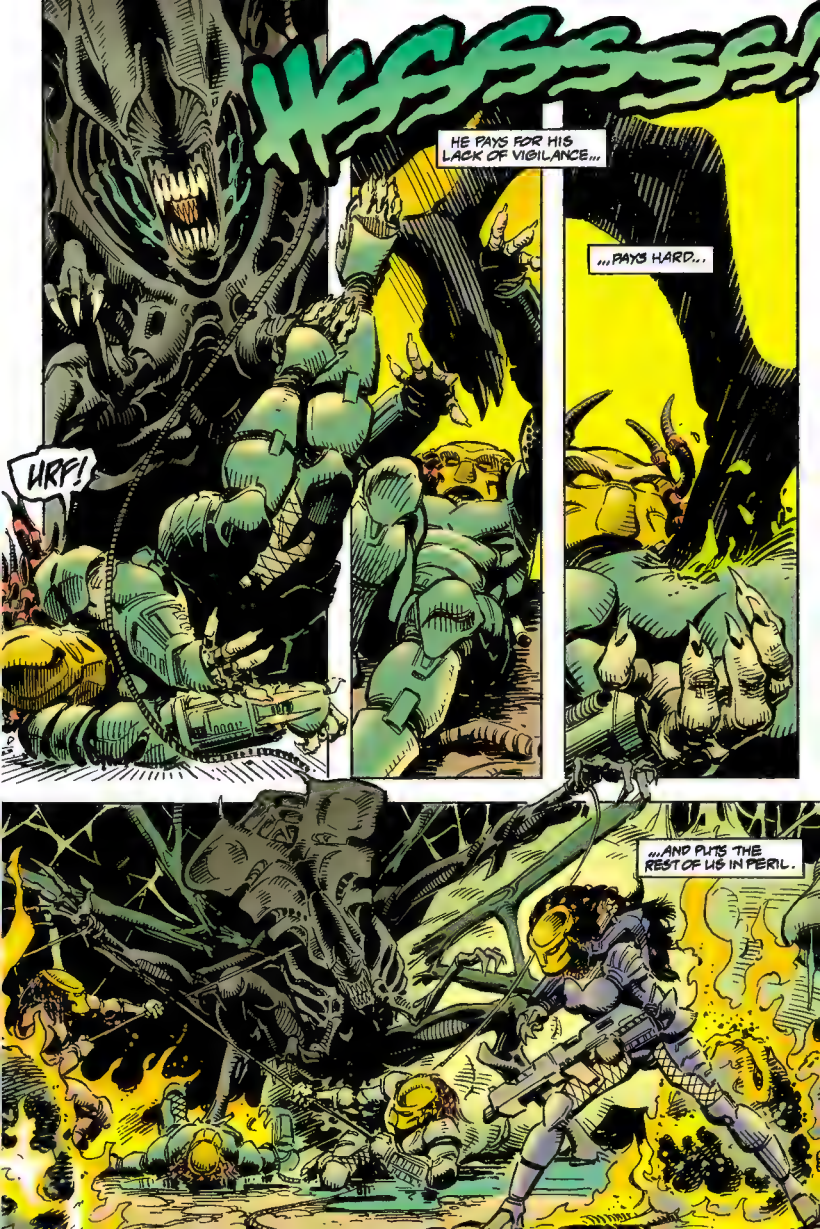
THEN, THE PASSAGES ECHOED WITH THE SCREAMS OF ANGRY BUGS. NOW IT'S SO STILL I CAN HEAR THE CRUNCH OF DRIED BONES BENEATH MY FEET.
THE BUGS AREN'T STRATEGISTS. THEY WOULDN'T WITHDRAW TO REGROUP...

SO WHERE ARE THE HIVE'S DEFENDERS?
HAVE WE ALREADY ACHIEVED OUR GOAL?

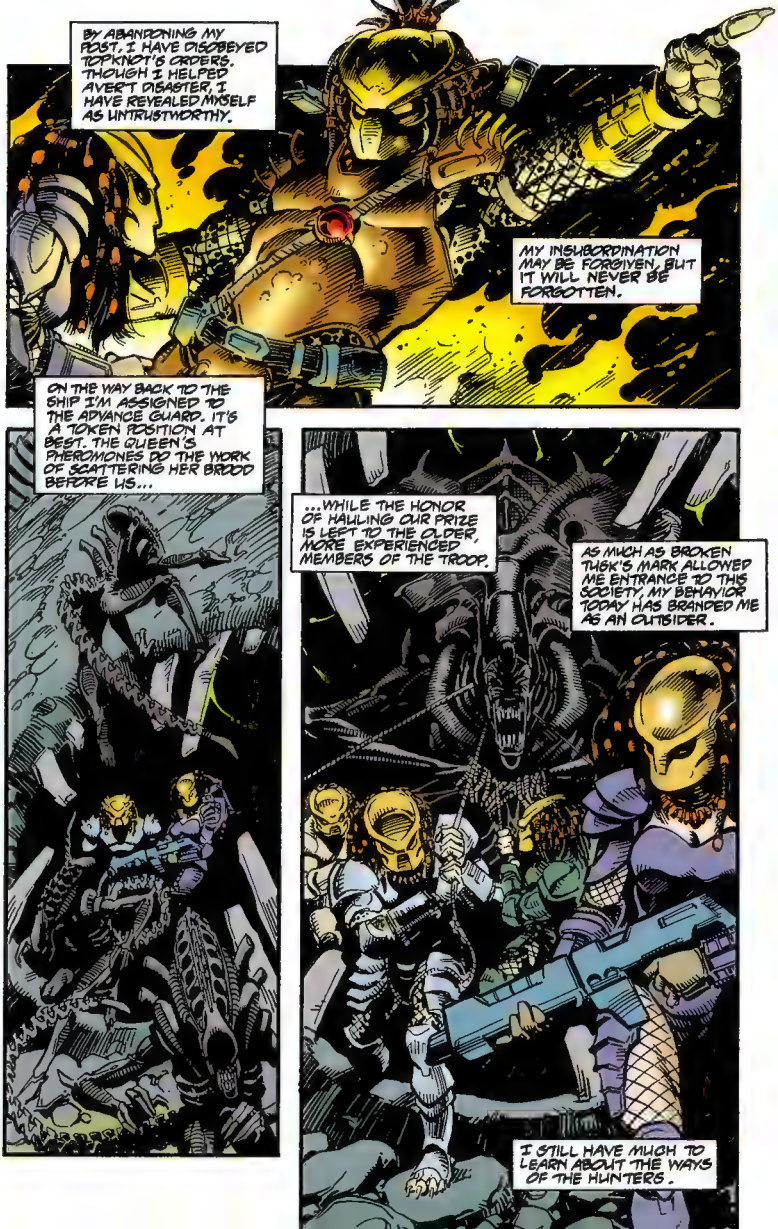
YES.
HISSSSSS

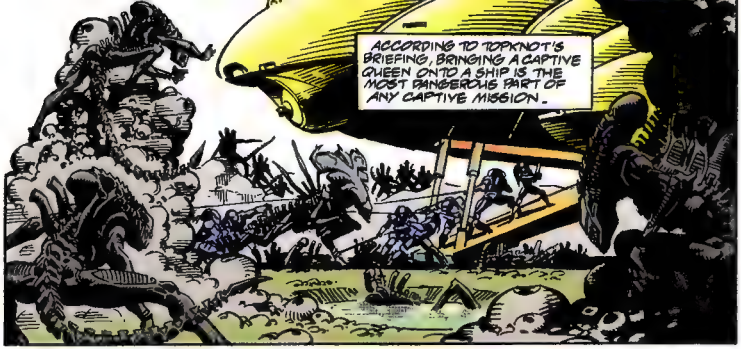

HSSS

OUR QUARRY IS SUBDUED, AND HER BROOD IS HELD AT BAY BY HER VULNERABILITY, BUT NOW COMES THE MOST DANGEROUS PART...
...THE CAPTURE TEAM MUST MAINTAIN CONTROL OF THE QUEEN AS TOPKNOT PREPARES HER FOR TRAVEL.
SHRIK
AAAHRK!
THREE-SPOT IS CAUGHT DAY-DREAMING...
SKRE

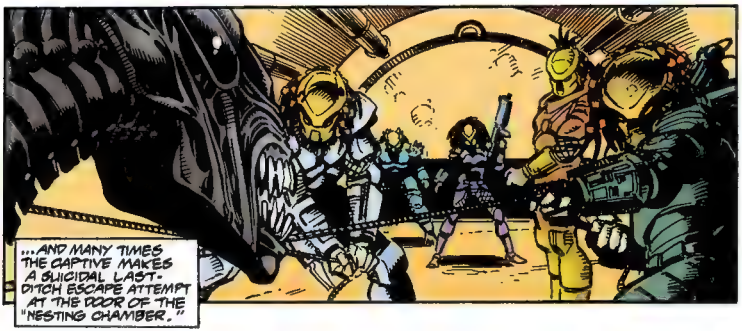

HSSSSSS!
HE PAYS FOR HIS LACK OF VIGILANCE...
...PAYS HARD...
URF!
...AND PUTS THE REST OF US IN PERIL.

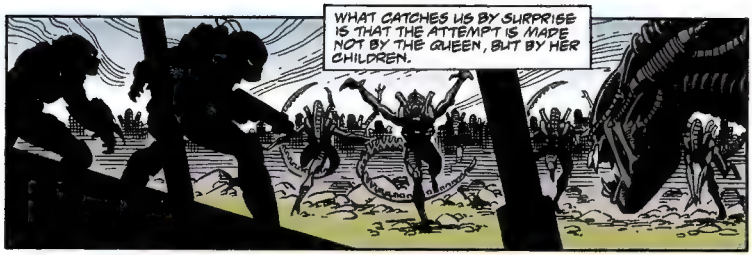
OUR CAPTURE PARTY'S CONTINUED SAFETY RESTS ON OUR ABILITY TO CONTROL THE QUEEN. HER FREEDOM WILL BE THE SIGNAL FOR HER BROOD TO ATTACK.
BACK WHEN I WAS CORPORATE RAMROD ON RYUSHI, I WOULD HAVE EXAMINED THE SITUATION... WEIGHED MY OPTIONS.
PEOPLE WOULD HAVE DIED.
NOW I SIMPLY ACT.
MY ACTIONS SAVE THE MISSION FROM DISASTER...
...BUT MY REWARD IS A REBUKE.


BY ABANDONING MY POST, I HAVE DISOBEYED TOPKNOT'S ORDERS. THOUGH I HELPED AVERT DISASTER, I HAVE REVEALED MYSELF AS UNTRUSTWORTHY.
MY INSUBORDINATION MAY BE FORGIVEN, BUT IT WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.
ON THE WAY BACK TO THE SHIP I'M ASSIGNED TO THE ADVANCE GUARD. IT'S A TOKEN POSITION AT BEST. THE QUEEN'S PHEROMONES DO THE WORK OF SCATTERING HER BROOD BEFORE US...
...WHILE THE HONOR OF HAULING OUR PRIZE IS LEFT TO THE OLDER, MORE EXPERIENCED MEMBERS OF THE TROOP.
AS MUCH AS BROKEN TUSK'S MARK ALLOWED ME ENTRANCE TO THIS SOCIETY, MY BEHAVIOR TODAY HAS BRANDED ME AS AN OUTSIDER.
I STILL HAVE MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT THE WAYS OF THE HUNTERS.


ACCORDING TO TOPKNOT'S BRIEFING, BRINGING A CAPTIVE QUEEN ONTO A SHIP IS THE MOST DANGEROUS PART OF ANY CAPTIVE MISSION.

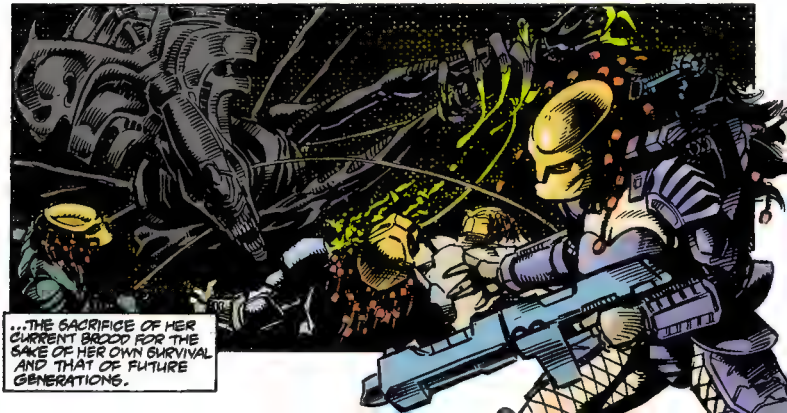
THE TIGHT CONFINES OF A SHIP ALLOW NO MARGIN FOR ERROR -- NO ROOM FOR SLACK...

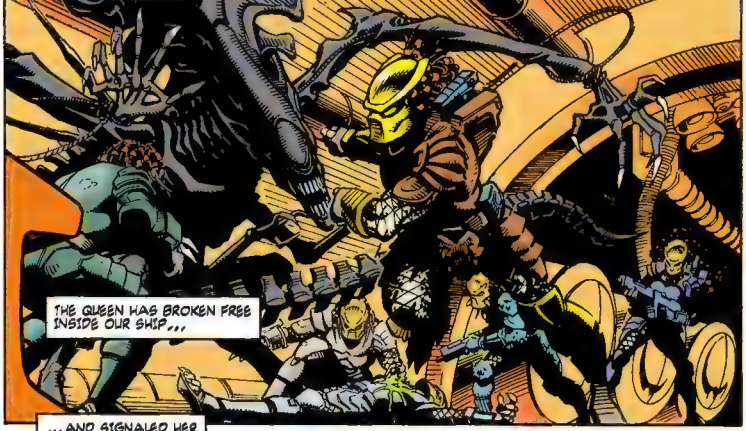

...AND MANY TIMES THE CAPTIVE MAKES A SUICIDAL LAST-DITCH ESCAPE ATTEMPT AT THE DOOR OF THE "NESTING CHAMBER."


WHAT CATCHES US BY SURPRISE IS THAT THE ATTEMPT IS MADE NOT BY THE QUEEN, BUT BY HER CHILDREN.

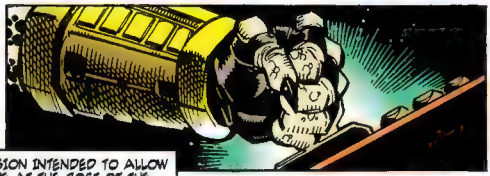
AN UNSEEN SIGNAL--OR A SILENT CALL--SPURS HER OFFSPRING INTO ACTION.

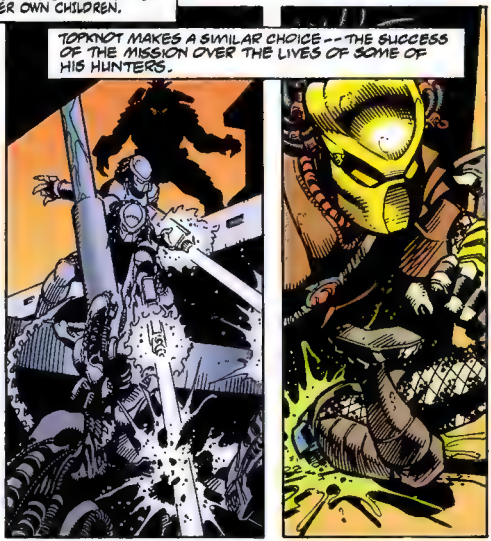
IT'S A CALCULATED RISK ON HER PART...


...THE SACRIFICE OF HER CURRENT BROOD FOR THE SAKE OF HER OWN SURVIVAL AND THAT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.

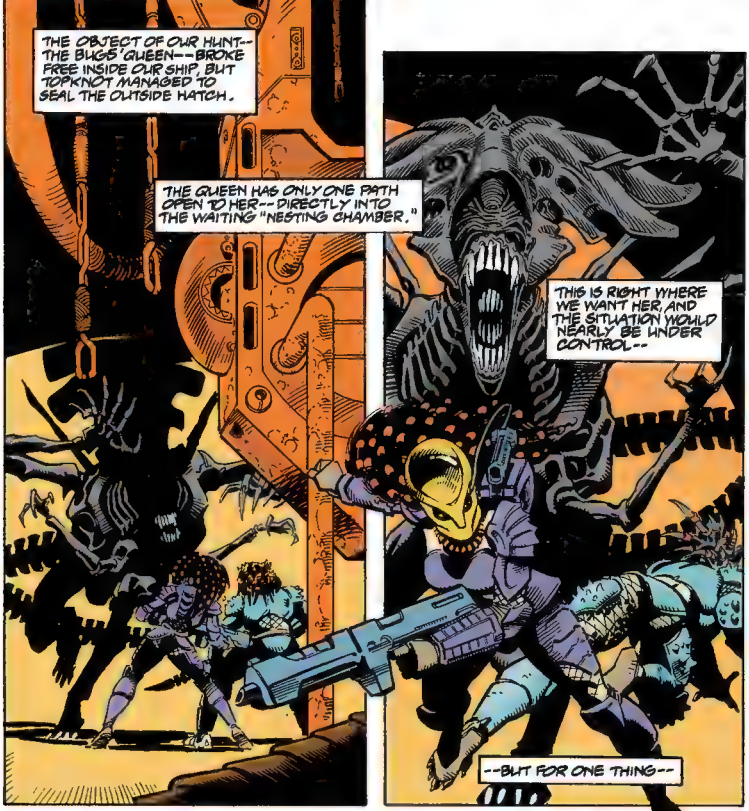

THE QUEEN HAS BROKEN FREE INSIDE OUR SHIP...

...AND SIGNALED HER BROOD TO ATTACK...




... A DECISION INTENDED TO ALLOW HER ESCAPE AT THE COST OF THE LIVES OF HER OWN CHILDREN.
TOPKNOT MAKES A SIMILAR CHOICE -- THE SUCCESS OF THE MISSION OVER THE LIVES OF SOME OF HIS HUNTERS.

WITH HER EXIT FROM THE SHIP CUT OFF...
...THE QUEEN HAS ONLY ONE DIRECTION LEFT TO HER...
...A PATH THAT LEADS THROUGH ME.


THE OBJECT OF OUR HUNT--THE BUGS' QUEEN---BROKE FREE INSIDE OUR SHIP, BUT TOPKNOT MANAGED TO SEAL THE OUTSIDE HATCH.
THE QUEEN HAS ONLY ONE PATH OPEN TO HER--DIRECTLY INTO THE WAITING "NESTING CHAMBER."
THIS IS RIGHT WHERE WE WANT HER, AND THE SITUATION WOULD NEARLY BE UNDER CONTROL--
--BUT FOR ONE THING--

--I'M INSIDE WITH HER.

MY GUN MOVES OF ITS OWN ACCORD. A FEW WELL-PLACED BURSTS...
HSSSS!
NO. TOO MANY OF MY COMPANIONS HAVE PAID WITH THEIR LIVES TODAY TRYING TO REACH THIS GOAL. TO KILL THE QUEEN NOW WOULD NEGATE THEIR SACRIFICES.
IN THIS SITUATION, HONOR OFFERS ONLY ONE COURSE OF ACTION--
--RETREAT.

MY BREATH COMES IN RAGGED GASPS, ECHOING INSIDE MY HELMET. MY HEART DRUMS A MACHINE-GUN BEAT IN MY CHEST. MY FEET POUND A COUNTER-RHYTHM ON THE STEEL FLOOR OF THE NESTING CHAMBER.

I DON'T HEAR ANY OF IT.

ALL I'M AWARE OF IS THE SOUND OF THE QUEEN'S PURSUIT...AND MY OWN MORTALITY.

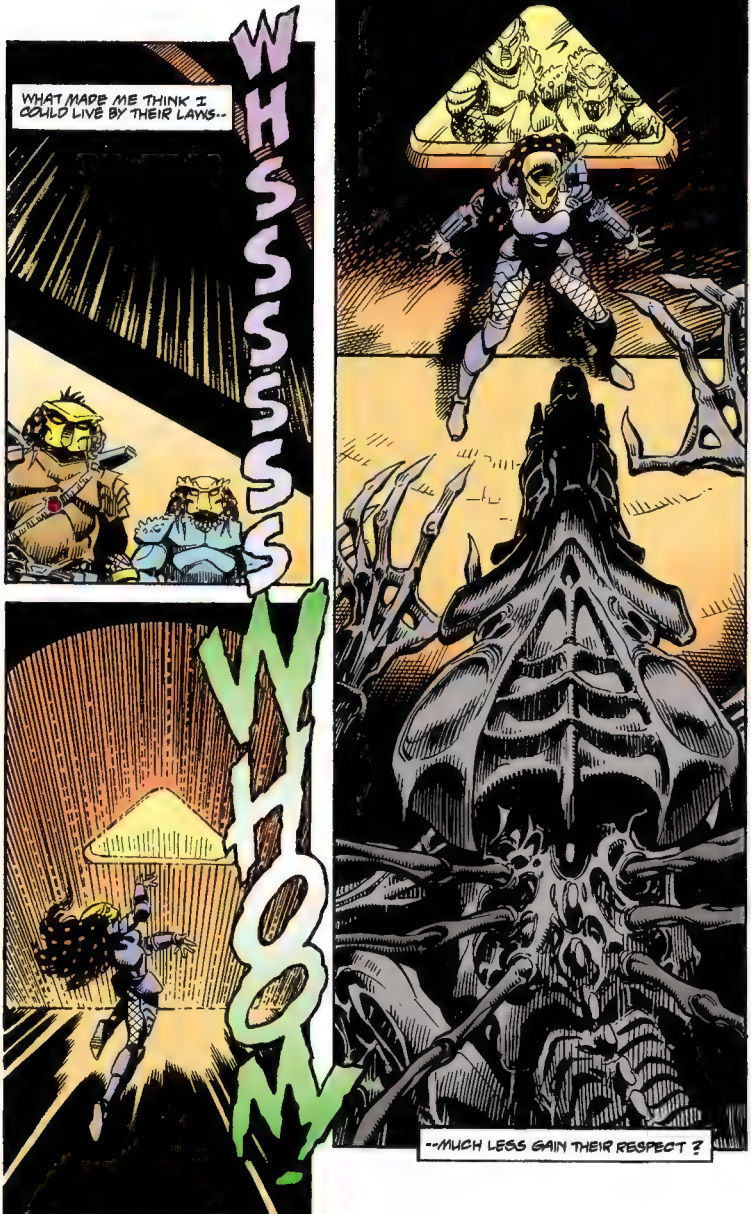
LEAVING RYUSHI AND JOINING THE HUNTERS SEEMED LIKE THE LOGICAL THING--THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

NOW THE DECISION JUST SEEMS STUPID AND VAIN.

WHAT MADE ME THINK THAT I COULD MATCH THE WAYS OF THESE HALF-SAVAGES?

WHAT DID I HOPE TO PROVE TO MYSELF?

CHAK


WHAT MADE ME THINK I COULD LIVE BY THEIR LAWS--
WHSSSSSS
WHOOM!
--MUCH LESS GAIN THEIR RESPECT ?

I GUESS I'LL WORRY ABOUT SAVING FACE...
...AFTER I SAVE MY SKIN.
MY "PAL" SHORTY SEALED THE MAIN DOOR, BUT THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY OUT OF ANY TRAP.

SZAAZSK!
ALTHOUGH, THIS IS EQUIVALENT TO BEING IN A TIGER TRAP WITH THE TIGER.
FORTUNATELY, TIGERS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WITH CLAWS.

SKREEEE
SHORTY AND THE BOYS WILL BE DISAPPOINTED, NO DOUBT.
BLAAANG
BUT WHAT DISAPPOINTS THEM MORE...
...THE FACT THAT THERE WASN'T MORE CARNAGE...
...OR THE FACT THAT I'VE MANAGED TO PROVE MYSELF ONE MORE TIME ?

WELL?
CLOSE-MOUTHED BASTARDS. NOT A WORD... NOT A GESTURE OF THANKS FOR SAVING THEIR ASSES.
TYPICAL MALES.

PART 2

script
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MARK HEIKE

inks
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CHRIS CHALENOR

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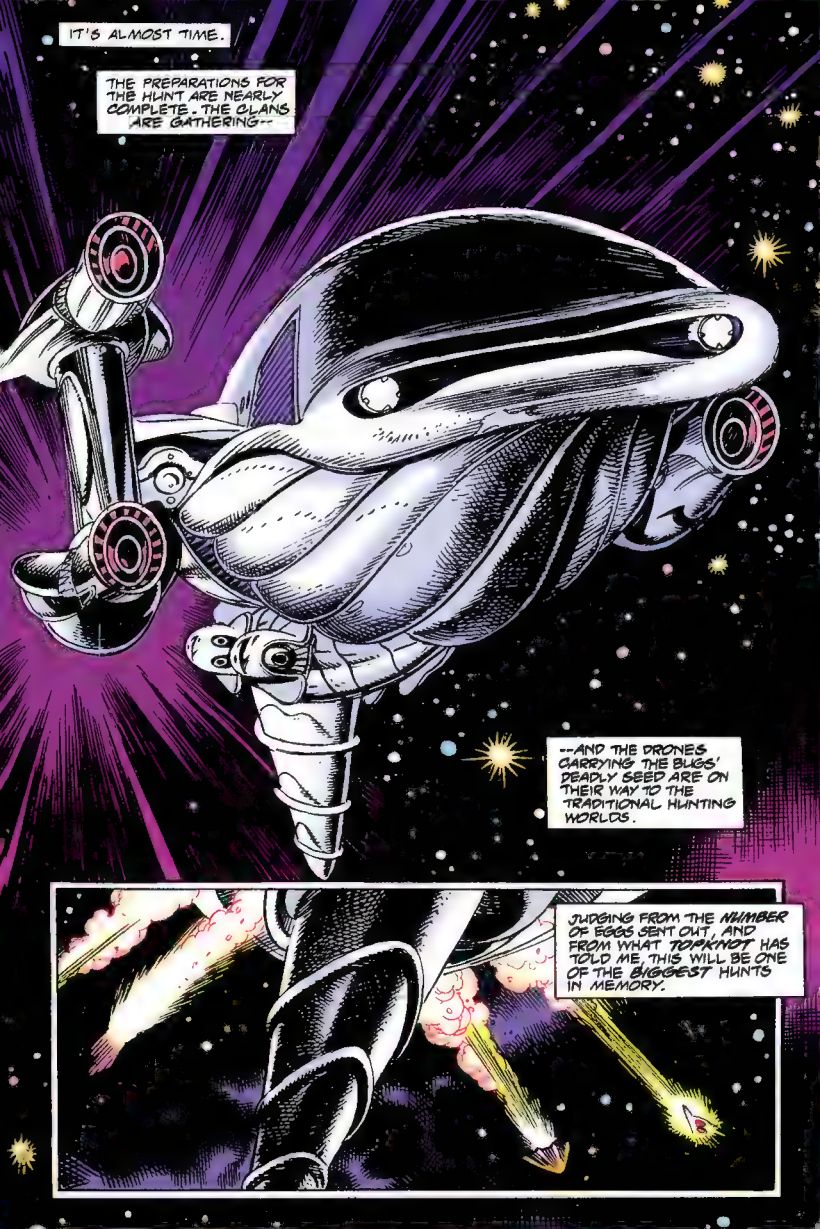
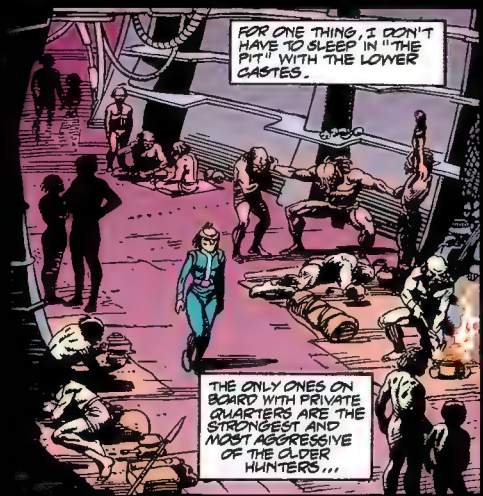

IT'S ALMOST TIME.
THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE HUNT ARE NEARLY COMPLETE. THE CLANS ARE GATHERING--
--AND THE DRONES CARRYING THE BUGS' DEADLY SEED ARE ON THEIR WAY TO THE TRADITIONAL HUNTING WORLDS.
JUDGING FROM THE NUMBER OF EGGS SENT OUT, AND FROM WHAT TOPKNOT HAS TOLD ME, THIS WILL BE ONE OF THE BIGGEST HUNTS IN MEMORY.

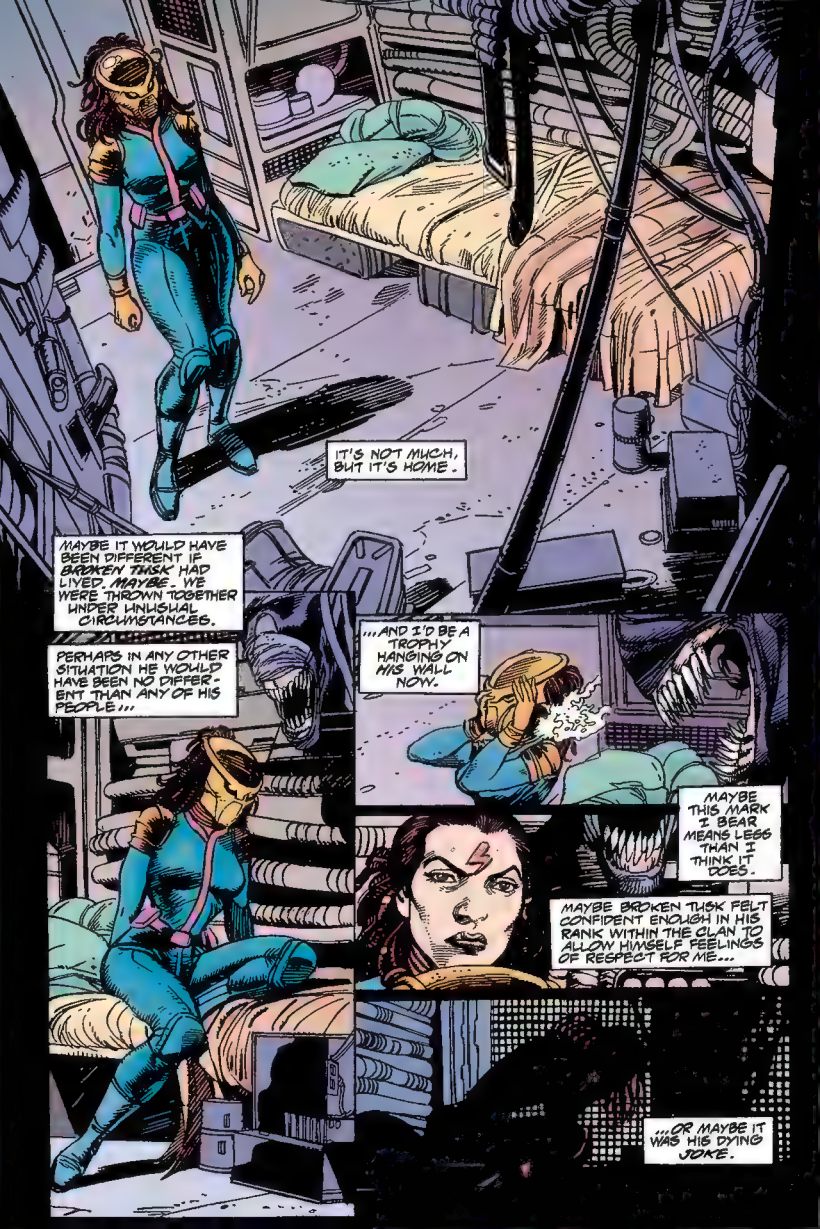
THE HUNT IS THE REASON I JOINED UP WITH BROKEN TUSK'S PEOPLE. I SHOULD FEEL EXCITED.
INSTEAD, ALL I FEEL IS ALONE.
MACHIKO NOGUCHI. COULDN'T MAKE IT IN HUMAN SOCIETY, SO SHE JOINED UP WITH A BUNCH OF X'TS. LIKE IT WOULD BE ANY EASIER.
HARD TO BELIEVE IT'S BEEN OVER A YEAR SINCE I CAME TO LIVE WITH THE HUNTERS. AN OUTSIDER ACCEPTED AS AN EQUAL.
NO, THAT'S WRONG. NOT REALLY AN EQUAL...
...AND NOT TRULY ACCEPTED...

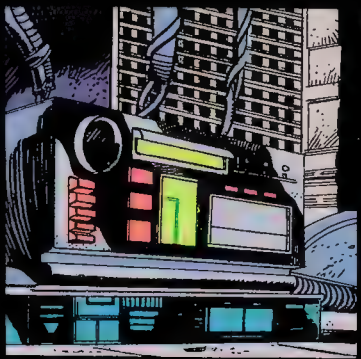
...NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I'VE PROVEN MYSELF.
Hsssss
SOMETIMES I THINK THAT THE HATRED THE BUG-QUEEN HAS FOR ME IS PREFERABLE TO THE INDIFFERENCE I GET FROM MY ADOPTED COMPANIONS.

THERE ARE SOME ADVANTAGES TO BEING "DIFFERENT."


FOR ONE THING, I DON'T HAVE TO SLEEP IN "THE PIT" WITH THE LOWER CASTES.
THE ONLY ONES ON BOARD WITH PRIVATE QUARTERS ARE THE STRONGEST AND MOST AGGRESSIVE OF THE OLDER HUNTERS...

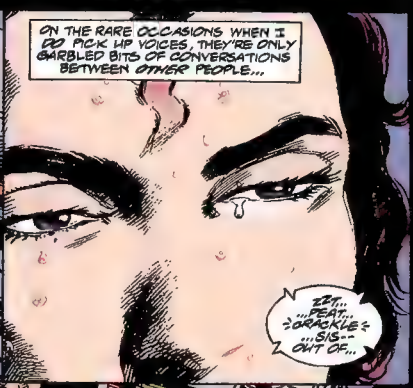
...AND ME.

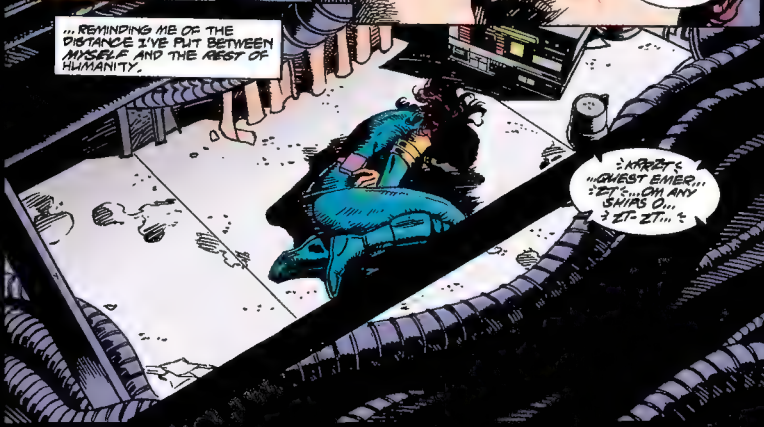

IT'S NOT MUCH, BUT IT'S HOME.
MAYBE IT WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT IF BROKEN TUSK HAD LIVED. MAYBE. WE WERE THROWN TOGETHER UNDER UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES.
PERHAPS IN ANY OTHER SITUATION HE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO DIFFERENT THAN ANY OF HIS PEOPLE...
...AND I'D BE A TROPHY HANGING ON HIS WALL NOW.
MAYBE THIS MARK I BEAR MEANS LESS THAN I THINK IT DOES.
MAYBE BROKEN TUSK FELT CONFIDENT ENOUGH IN HIS RANK WITHIN THE CLAN TO ALLOW HIMSELF FEELINGS OF RESPECT FOR ME...
...OR MAYBE IT WAS HIS DYING JOKE.



I DON'T KNOW WHY I BROUGHT THIS WITH ME FROM MY CABIN ON RYUSHI.
BZT
CRACKLE

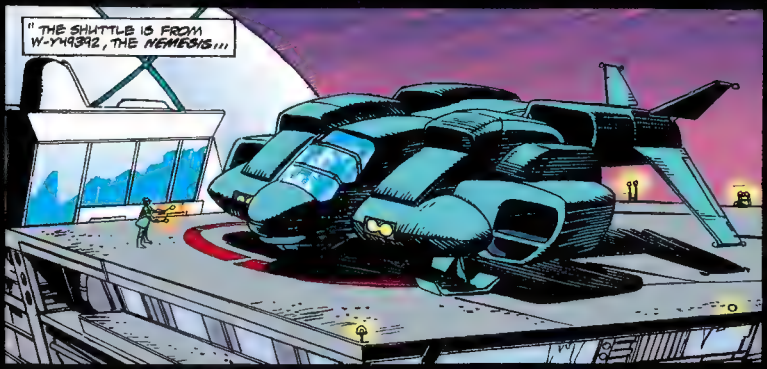
USUALLY ALL I GET IS STATIC.
SCANNING
SIZZLE
BOOP


ON THE RARE OCCASIONS WHEN I DO PICK UP VOICES, THEY'RE ONLY GARBLED BITS OF CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN OTHER PEOPLE...
ZZT... ...PEAT... ÷CRACKLE÷ ...SIS-- ...OUT OF...

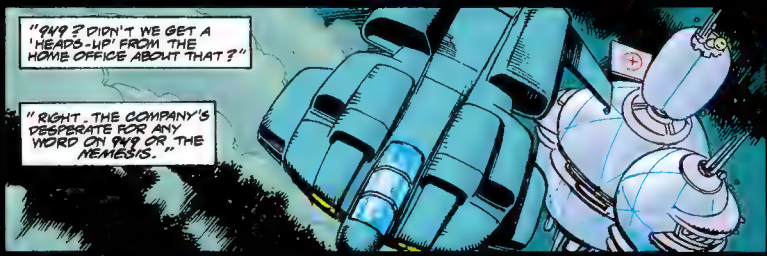

...REMINDING ME OF THE DISTANCE I'VE PUT BETWEEN MYSELF AND THE REST OF HUMANITY.
÷KRRZT÷ ...QUEST EMER... ÷ZT÷ ...OM ANY SHIPS O... ÷ZT- ZT...÷

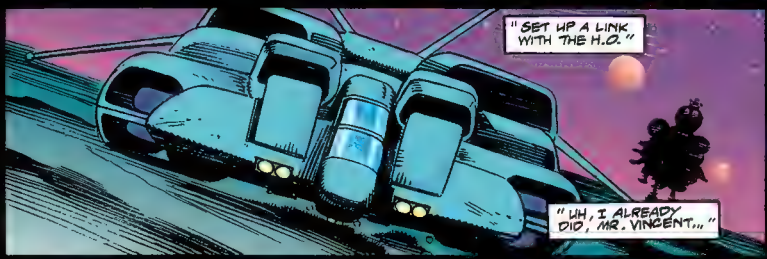
...REPEAT: THIS IS THE SHUTTLE FROM THE WEYLAND-YUTANI CRUISER NEMESIS--OUT OF FUEL AND ADRIFT. REQUEST EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FROM ANY SHIPS OR HUMAN OUTPOSTS RECEIVING THIS MESSAGE...
GIVE IT A REST, ELLIS.
THINK ABOUT IT, DICKWEED. ANYBODY WHO MIGHT HEAR YOU WILL HAVE POKED UP OUR DISTRESS BEACON HOURS BEFORE.
GO AHEAD AND DO NOTHING, JESS--I'M GONNA GET US RESCUED!
LET ELLIS TALK, IF IT MAKES HIM FEEL BETTER. WE ALL HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE STRESS IN OUR OWN WAY.
YEAH? WELL, I'M GONNA DEAL WITH HIM IF HE DOESN'T--
NEMESIS SHUTTLE, THIS IS BUNDA SURVEY. WE READ YOU, FOUR-BY-FOUR, OVER.
BUNDA SURVEY, THIS IS NEMESIS SHUTTLE!
KEEP 'IM TALKIN', ELLIS! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU?

MR. VINCENT, YOU'RE NEEDED ON THE CONTROL LEVEL.
ROGER, NEMESIS SHUTTLE. WE'RE DISPATCHING A SHIP TO YOUR POSITION. E.T.A.-- SIX HOURS.
WHAT HAVE YOU GOT CABOT?
A DISTRESS CALL FROM A LOST SHUTTLE.
CAN WE HELP THEM?
THEY SAY THAT IF WE CAN GET FUEL TO THEM, THEY CAN COME DOWN UNDER THEIR OWN POWER. OUR D-SHIP IS WARMING UP RIGHT NOW, MR. VINCENT.
AND?

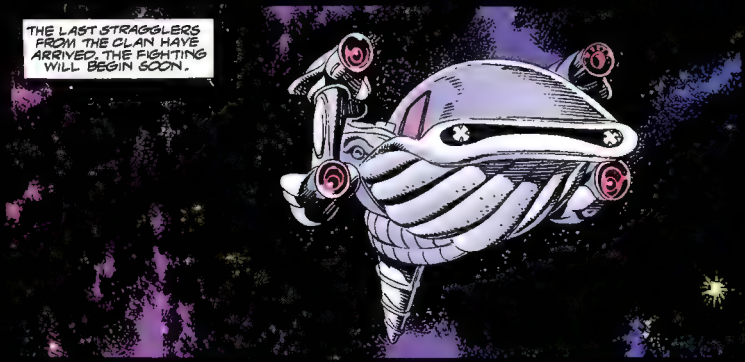

"THE SHUTTLE IS FROM W-Y49392, THE NEMESIS..."

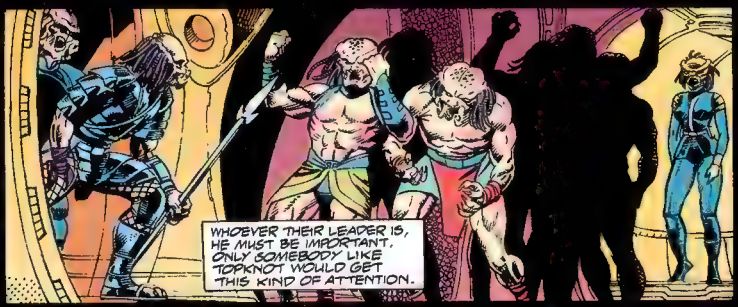
"...LAST KNOWN PORT OF CALL: TERMINAL 949."


"949? DIDN'T WE GET A 'HEADS-UP' FROM THE HOME OFFICE ABOUT THAT?"
"RIGHT. THE COMPANY'S DESPERATE FOR ANY WORD ON 949 OR THE NEMESIS."


"SET UP A LINK WITH THE H.O."
"UH, I ALREADY DID, MR. VINCENT..."

YOU ALREADY--?
I KNEW YOU'D WANT TO... WA, THEY SAID THEY WANT YOU TO COORDINATE WITH A MR. BRIGGS--
HE... MR. BRIGGS, THAT IS, IS ALREADY EN ROUTE. HE'S WAITING FOR YOU ON COM 6...
THANK YOU, MR. CABOT.
EVERYBODY BACK TO WORK.
BRIGGS? KEVIN VINCENT HERE -- ARCHEY 377, BUNDA SURVEY...
YOUR MAN CABOT ALREADY FILLED ME IN. YOU'VE HEARD FROM NEMESIS?
YES. THE SHUTTLE SHOULD ARRIVE HERE IN ABOUT THIRTEEN HOURS...
THAT'LL MAKE IT 11:00 A.M. LOCAL TIME--
WHATEVER. LISTEN-- EARTHSIDE WANTS ME TO HANDLE THIS PERSONALLY, BUT I'M STILL TWENTY-FIVE HOURS AWAY.
I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU A CODE WORD, VINCENT. CANCER BLACK.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND VINCENT?
B-BUT THAT'S--
KEEP IT QUIET UNTIL I GET THERE.


THE LAST STRAGGLERS FROM THE CLAN HAVE ARRIVED. THE FIGHTING WILL BEGIN SOON.

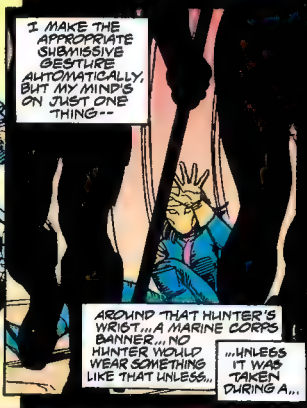

WHOEVER THEIR LEADER IS, HE MUST BE IMPORTANT. ONLY SOMEBODY LIKE TOPKNOT WOULD GET THIS KIND OF ATTENTION.

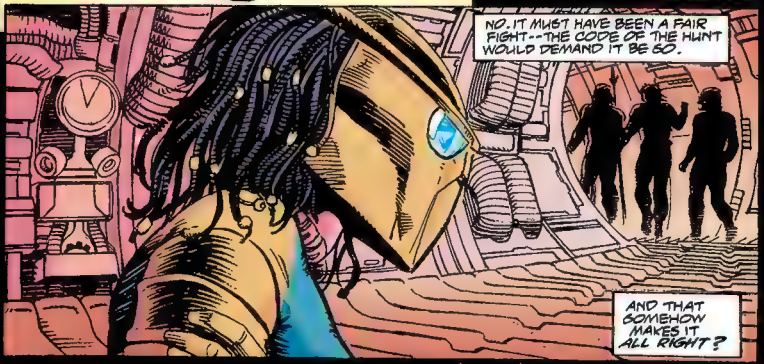
STILL YOUNG, BUT WITH SCARS THAT WOULD DO A VETERAN PROUD...

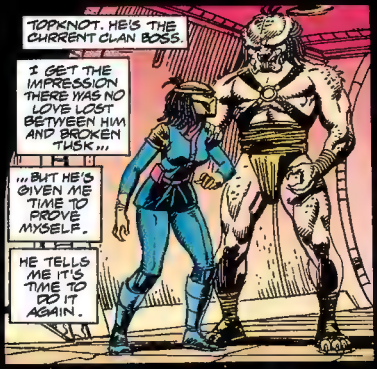
IT'S HUMAN...
...MADE BY HUMANS... MARINE...

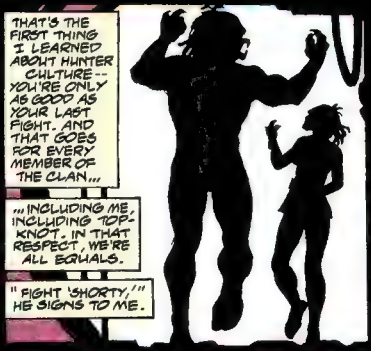
MISTAKE, STUPID.

I DESERVE WHAT I GET.


I MAKE THE APPROPRIATE SUBMISSIVE GESTURE AUTOMATICALLY, BUT MY MIND'S ON JUST ONE THING--
AROUND THAT HUNTER'S WRIST...A MARINE CORPS BANNER... NO HUNTER WOULD WEAR SOMETHING LIKE THAT UNLESS...
...UNLESS IT WAS TAKEN DURING A...


NO. IT MUST HAVE BEEN A FAIR FIGHT--THE CODE OF THE HUNT WOULD DEMAND IT BE SO.
AND THAT SOMEHOW MAKES IT ALL RIGHT?

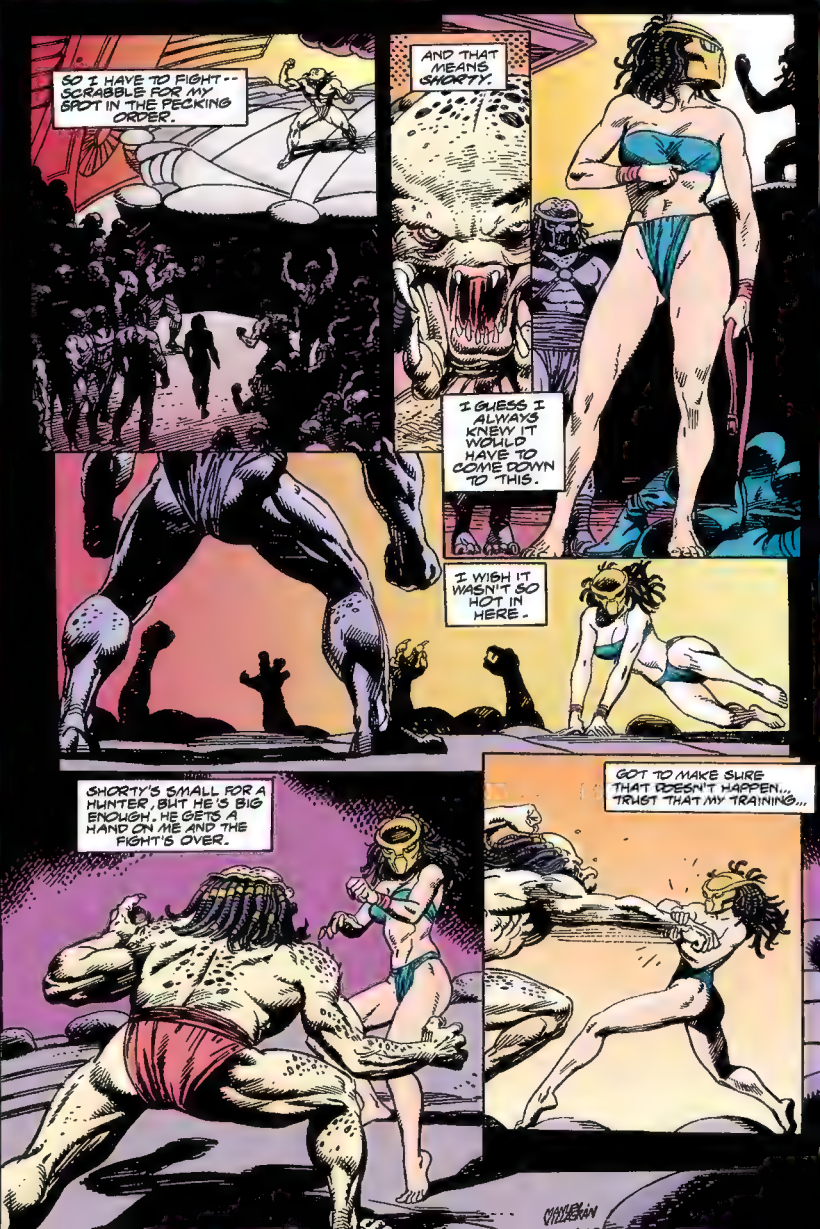

TOPKNOT. HE'S THE CURRENT CLAN BOSS.
I GET THE IMPRESSION THERE WAS NO LOVE LOST BETWEEN HIM AND BROKEN TUSK...
...BUT HE'S GIVEN ME TIME TO PROVE MYSELF.
HE TELLS ME IT'S TIME TO DO IT AGAIN.


THAT'S THE FIRST THING I LEARNED ABOUT HUNTER CULTURE -- YOU'RE ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR LAST FIGHT. AND THAT GOES FOR EVERY MEMBER OF THE CLAN...
...INCLUDING ME, INCLUDING TOPKNOT. IN THAT RESPECT, WE'RE ALL EQUALS.
"FIGHT 'SHORTY,'" HE SIGNS TO ME.

"I KNOW."
THE SECOND THING I LEARNED WAS THAT I'M THE LEAST AMONG EQUALS.

TOPKNOT COULD TALK TO ME -- I KNOW HE UNDERSTANDS ENGLISH, BUT HE WON'T. NONE OF THEM WILL.
INSTEAD THEY "SPEAK" TO ME IN THE SILENT HAND-SIGNAL LANGUAGE OF THE HUNT.

THE SIGNS WERE NEVER INTENDED TO CONVEY COMPLICATED THOUGHTS, BUT TOPKNOT'S MESSAGE IS CLEAR ENOUGH.
"THOSE WITHOUT HONOR ARE NOT PART OF THE HUNT/CLAN, AND THOSE WHO DO NOT FIGHT FOR THEIR HONOR HAVE NO HONOR."


SO I HAVE TO FIGHT -- SCRABBLE FOR MY SPOT IN THE PECKING ORDER.
AND THAT MEANS SHORTY.
I GUESS I ALWAYS KNEW IT WOULD HAVE TO COME DOWN TO THIS.
I WISH IT WASN'T SO HOT IN HERE.
SHORTY'S SMALL FOR A HUNTER, BUT HE'S BIG ENOUGH. HE GETS A HAND ON ME AND THE FIGHT'S OVER.
GOT TO MAKE SURE THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN... TRUST THAT MY TRAINING...
MANLEY VILLEGAS

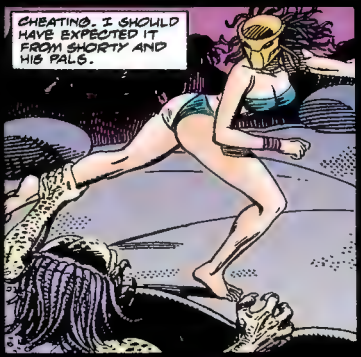
...IS ENOUGH TO COUNTERACT HIS STRENGTH.
WUMP
NOW HE'S MAD.
GOOD, MAYBE I CAN USE THAT TO MY ADVANTAGE.

THUMP
RAKKGH!
HURK!
URF!
TIME TO FINISH THIS.

KEEP THE PRESSURE ON.
RULES SAY I HAVE TO KNOCK SHORTY OFF THE STAGE OR RENDER HIM UNCONSCIOUS. I'M NOT PARTICULAR--

-- BUT KICKING HIM SENSELESS HOLDS A CERTAIN APPEAL.

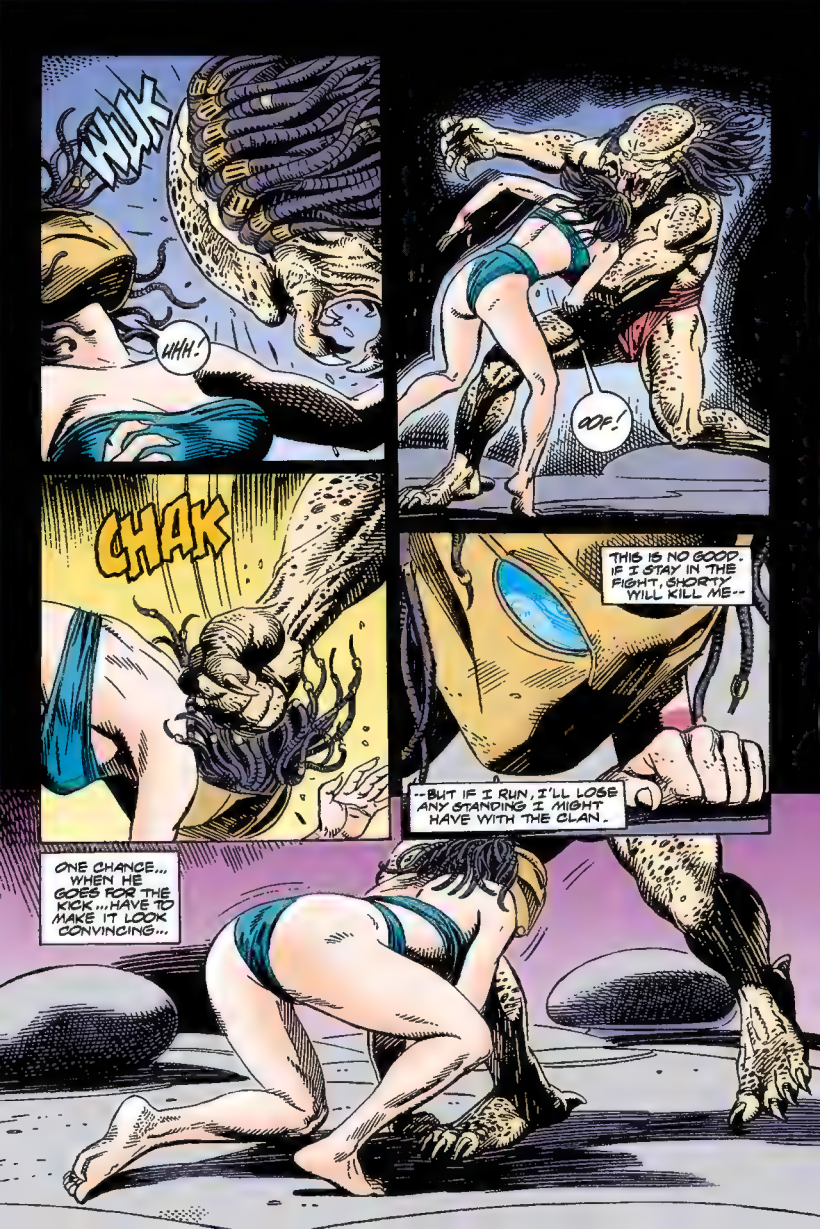
WHA--?

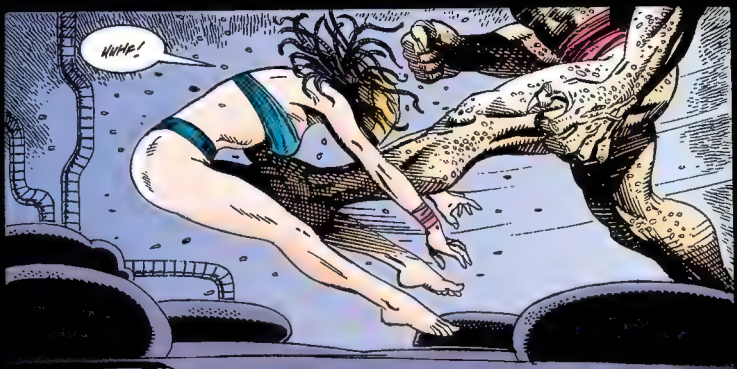

CHEATING. I SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED IT FROM SHORTY AND HIS PALS.

I HAVE TO DEAL WITH THIS QUICKLY--

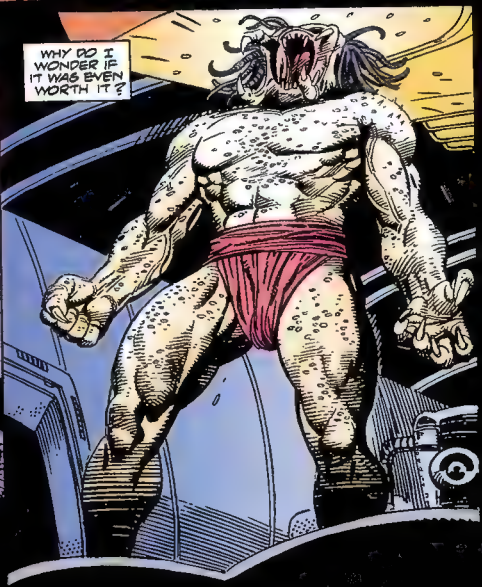
--CAN'T LET SHORTY HAVE A CHANCE TO--

--RECOVER...


WUK
UHH!
OOF!
CHAK
THIS IS NO GOOD. IF I STAY IN THE FIGHT, SHORTY WILL KILL ME--
--BUT IF I RUN, I'LL LOSE ANY STANDING I MIGHT HAVE WITH THE CLAN.
ONE CHANCE... WHEN HE GOES FOR THE KICK...HAVE TO MAKE IT LOOK CONVINCING...


HUHF!

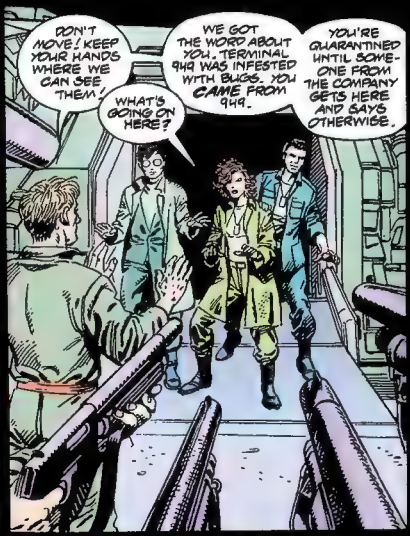
DID IT... BARELY.
I LOST MY CHANCE TO JOIN THE HUNT, BUT I SAVED MY LIFE.


WHY DO I WONDER IF IT WAS EVEN WORTH IT?

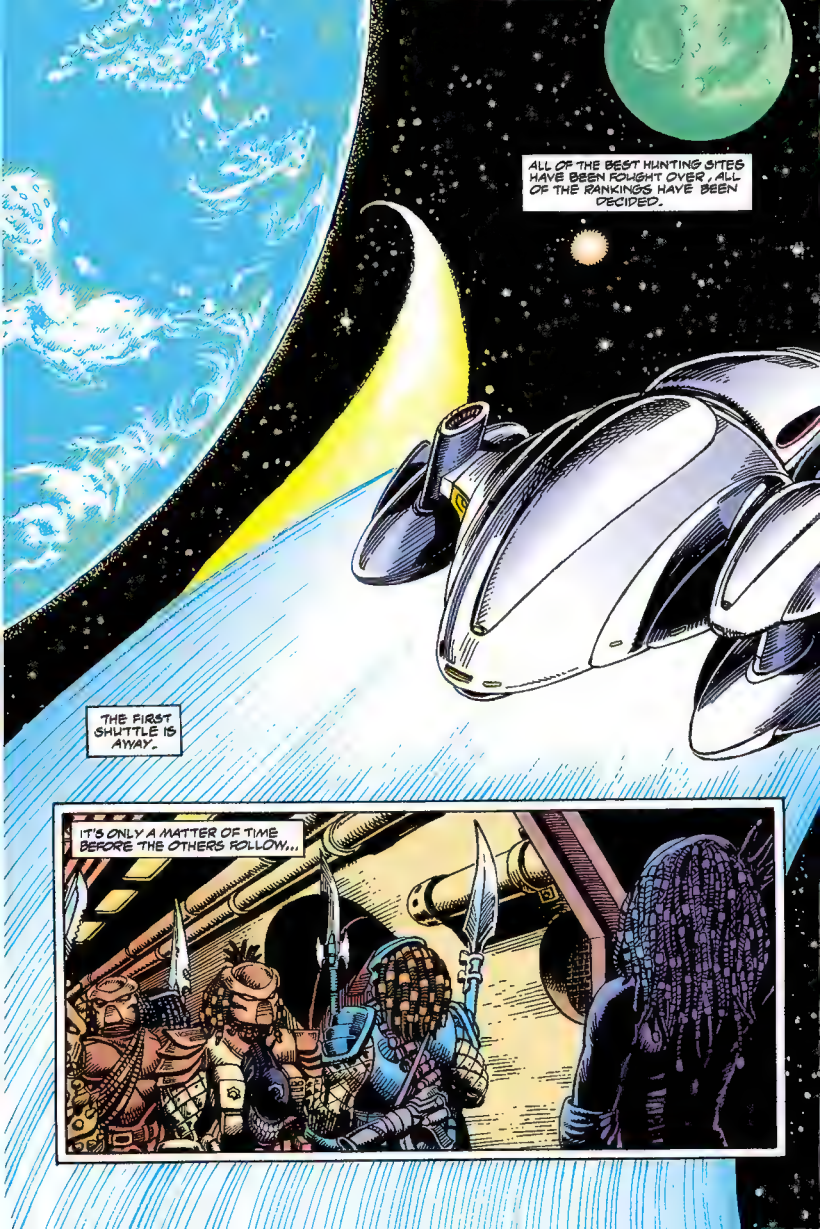
BUNDA SURVEY, WE HAVE YOU IN SIGHT. REPEAT, WE HAVE VISUAL.

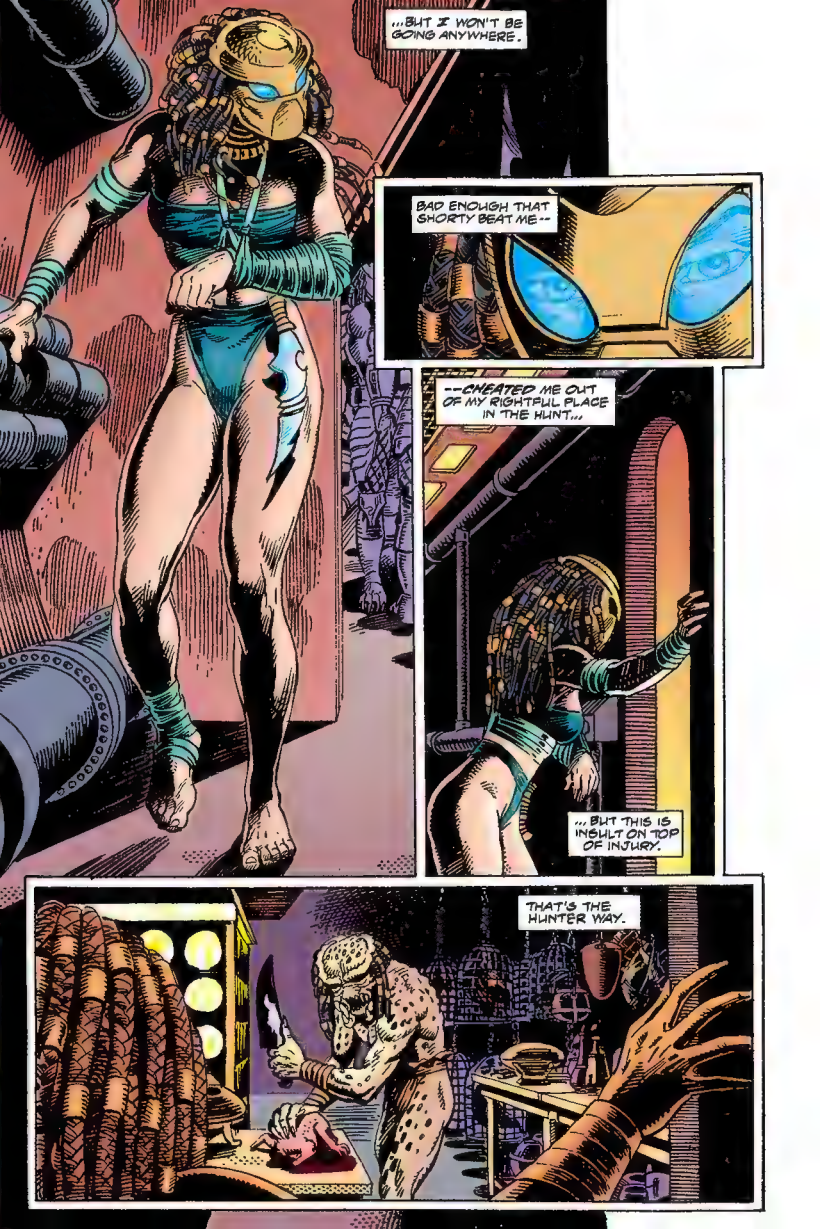
ROGER THAT, NEMESIS SHUTTLE. YOU'RE CLEARED FOR LANDING ON DECK SEVEN.
EASY, LARA-- DON'T RUSH IT.
CAN IT, JESS. THIS ISN'T ANYTHING I HAVEN'T DONE A MILLION TIMES BEFORE.
WE'RE DOWN.
FINALLY! FIRST STOP, THE MESS HALL. A TUB THIS BIG HAS GOT TO HAVE REAL FOOD IN ITS LARDER.
FIRST WE THANK WHOEVER'S IN COMMAND FOR GIVING US ENOUGH FUEL TO LAND HERE. THEN WE HIT THE SHOWERS--
--BELIEVE ME, WE ALL NEED ONE.
AND YOU COULD BOTH DO WITH A SHAVE.
REALLY? I THOUGHT THE BEARD MADE ME LOOK MORE MANLY.
YOU DON'T NEED A BEARD FOR THAT, ELLIS. GETTING INTO THAT MAX ARMOR PROVED YOU'VE GOT WHAT IT TAKES.
GIVE THE KID A BREAK, LARA. YOU'RE EMBARRASSING HIM.

MMM! SMELL THAT. REAL AIR.
PHEW! SMELLS LIKE JUNGLE ROT, IF YOU ASK--
WHAT?


DON'T MOVE! KEEP YOUR HANDS WHERE WE CAN SEE THEM!
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
WE GOT THE WORD ABOUT YOU. TERMINAL 949 WAS INFESTED WITH BUGS. YOU CAME FROM 949.
YOU'RE QUARANTINED UNTIL SOMEONE FROM THE COMPANY GETS HERE AND SAYS OTHERWISE.

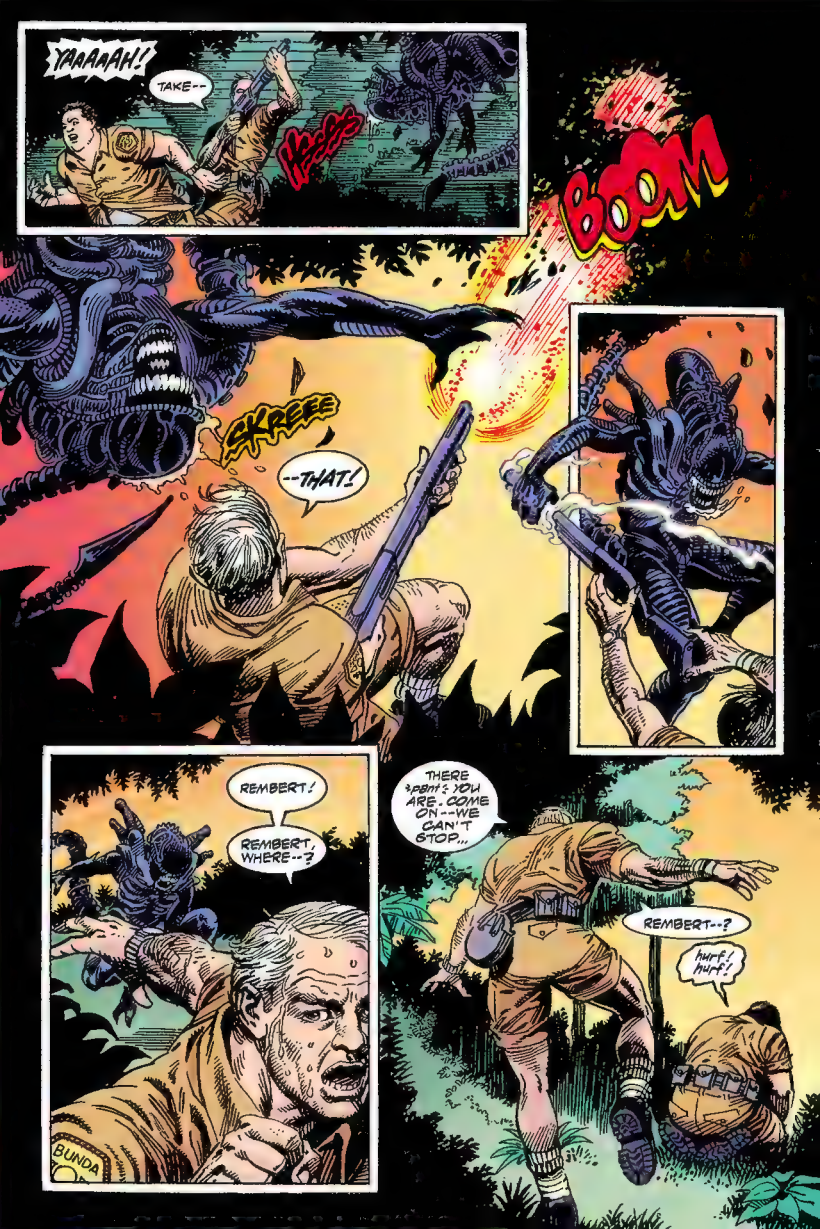
" WE'RE NOT RISKING INFECTION HERE ON BLINDA."


ALL OF THE BEST HUNTING SITES HAVE BEEN FOUGHT OVER, ALL OF THE RANKINGS HAVE BEEN DECIDED.
THE FIRST SHUTTLE IS AWAY.
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE OTHERS FOLLOW...

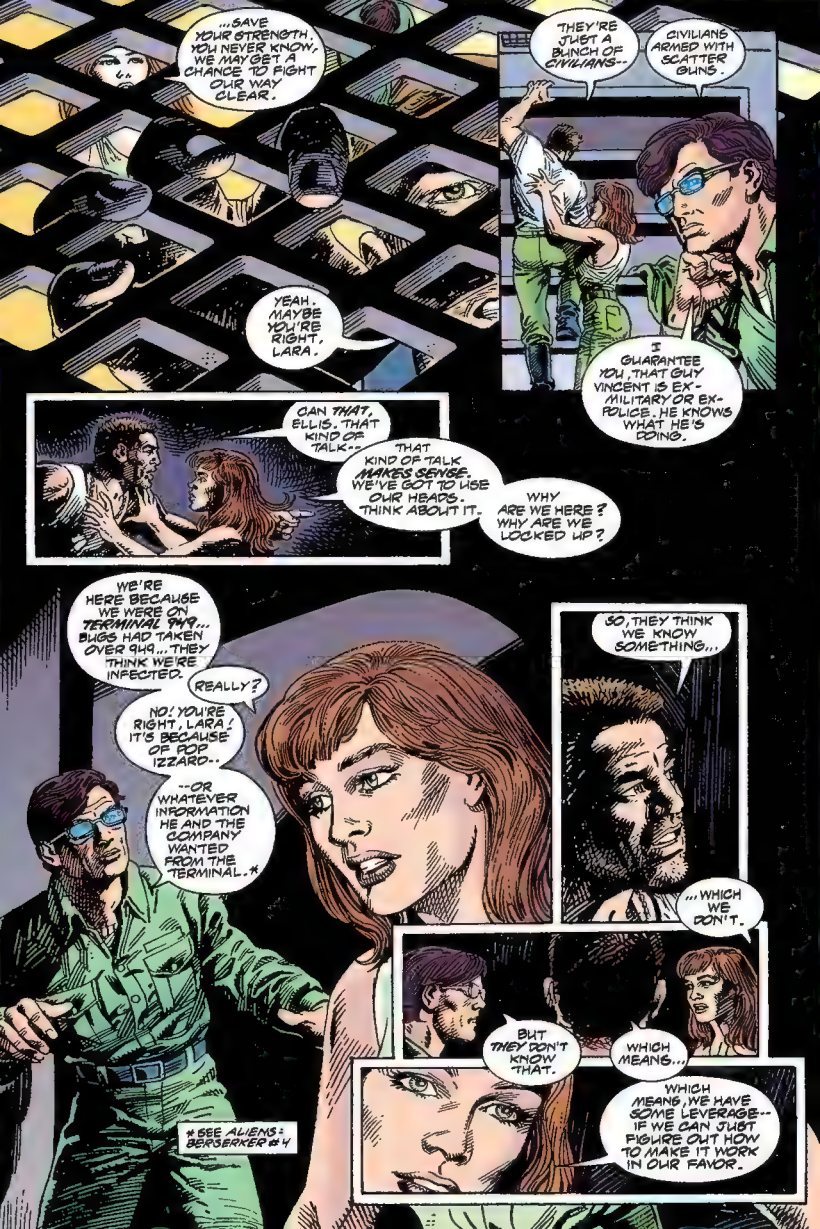

...BUT I WON'T BE GOING ANYWHERE.
BAD ENOUGH THAT SHORTY BEAT ME--
--CHEATED ME OUT OF MY RIGHTFULL PLACE IN THE HUNT...
...BUT THIS IS INSULT ON TOP OF INJURY.
THAT'S THE HUNTER WAY.

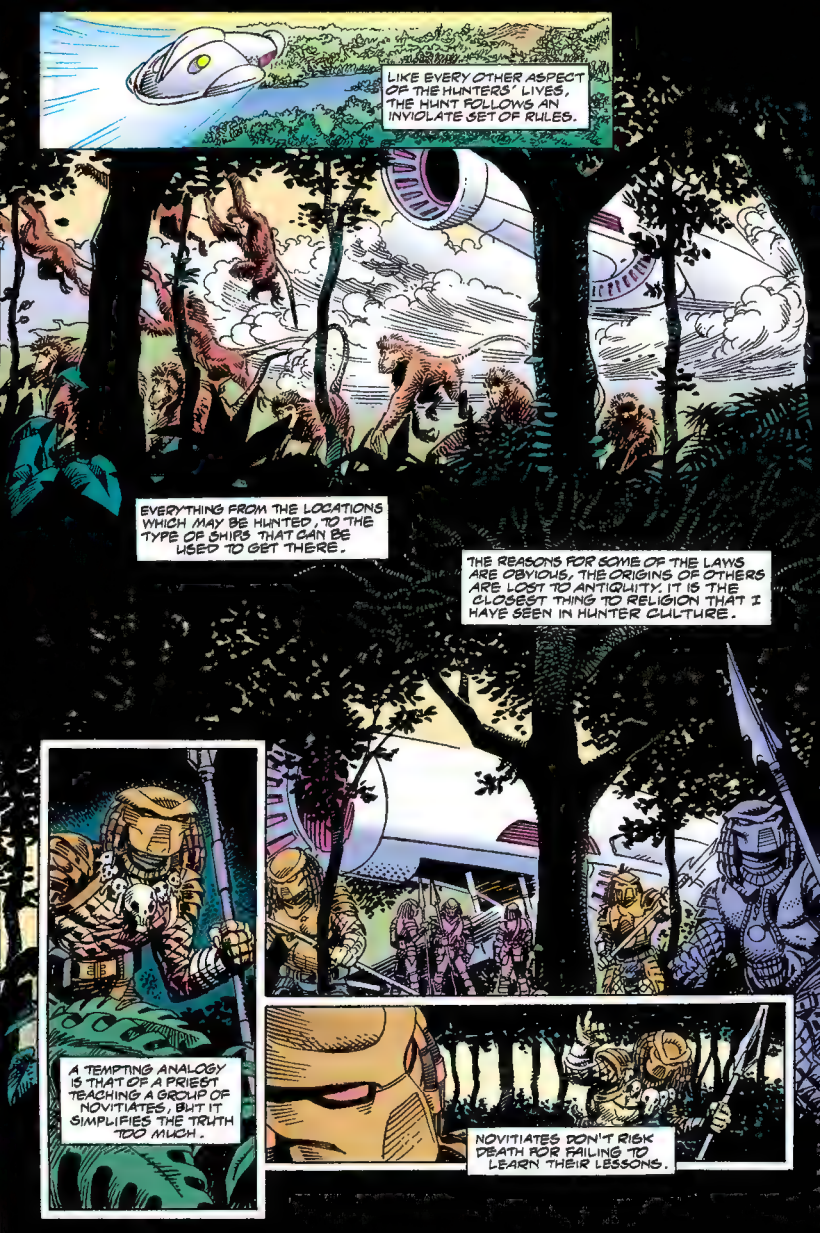
TIME TO STOP FEELING SORRY FOR MACHIKO NOGUCHI.
I GOT MYSELF INTO THIS, I CAN GET MYSELF OUT.

STUPID GUN--!
WAIT ;puff; A SECOND, PRATT--
GET YOUR HAND OFF ME, REMBERT!
--I DON'T THINK ;puff; IT'S CHASING US ANYMORE. LISTEN...
WHAT? WELL, WHERE IS IT? HOW DID IT GET HERE?
HOW SHOULD I KNOW?
WE COULD BE CALLING IN HELP RIGHT NOW--IF YOU'D THOUGHT TO GRAB THE RADIO.
THE RADIO--?! I WAS BUSY DUCKING! YOU FIRED FIVE SHOTS ;puff; AND DIDN'T COME CLOSE TO HITTING ANYTHING BUT ME!
YEAH... WELL I WON'T MISS NEXT TIME...
CH-CHUK


YAAAAAH!
TAKE--
BOOM
SKREEE
--THAT!
REMBERT!
REMBERT, WHERE--?
BUNDA
THERE *PANT* YOU ARE. COME ON--WE CAN'T STOP...
REMBERT--?
hurf! hurf!

REMBERT!
SURVEY TEAM
NO...
NO!
NO WAY OUT.
I TOLD YOU, JESS. TRY TO RELAX...


...SAVE YOUR STRENGTH; YOU NEVER KNOW, WE MAY GET A CHANCE TO FIGHT OUR WAY CLEAR.
THEY'RE JUST A BUNCH OF CIVILIANS--
CIVILIANS ARMED WITH SCATTER GUNS.
YEAH. MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT, LARA.
I GUARANTEE YOU, THAT GUY VINCENT IS EX-MILITARY OR EX-POLICE. HE KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING.
CAN THAT, ELLIS. THAT KIND OF TALK--
THAT KIND OF TALK MAKES SENSE. WE'VE GOT TO USE OUR HEADS. THINK ABOUT IT.
WHY ARE WE HERE? WHY ARE WE LOCKED UP?
WE'RE HERE BECAUSE WE WERE ON TERMINAL 949... BUGS HAD TAKEN OVER 949... THEY THINK WE'RE INFECTED.
REALLY?
NO! YOU'RE RIGHT, LARA! IT'S BECAUSE OF POP IZZARD--
--OR WHATEVER INFORMATION HE AND THE COMPANY WANTED FROM THE TERMINAL.*
SO, THEY THINK WE KNOW SOMETHING...
...WHICH WE DON'T.
BUT THEY DON'T KNOW THAT.
WHICH MEANS...
WHICH MEANS, WE HAVE SOME LEVERAGE-- IF WE CAN JUST FIGURE OUT HOW TO MAKE IT WORK IN OUR FAVOR.
* SEE ALIENS: BERSERKER #4


LIKE EVERY OTHER ASPECT OF THE HUNTERS' LIVES, THE HUNT FOLLOWS AN INVIOLATE SET OF RULES.
EVERYTHING FROM THE LOCATIONS WHICH MAY BE HUNTED, TO THE TYPE OF SHIPS THAT CAN BE USED TO GET THERE.
THE REASONS FOR SOME OF THE LAWS ARE OBVIOUS, THE ORIGINS OF OTHERS ARE LOST TO ANTIQUITY. IT IS THE CLOSEST THING TO RELIGION THAT I HAVE SEEN IN HUNTER CULTURE.
A TEMPTING ANALOGY IS THAT OF A PRIEST TEACHING A GROUP OF NOVITIATES, BUT IT SIMPLIFIES THE TRUTH TOO MUCH.
NOVITIATES DON'T RISK DEATH FOR FAILING TO LEARN THEIR LESSONS.

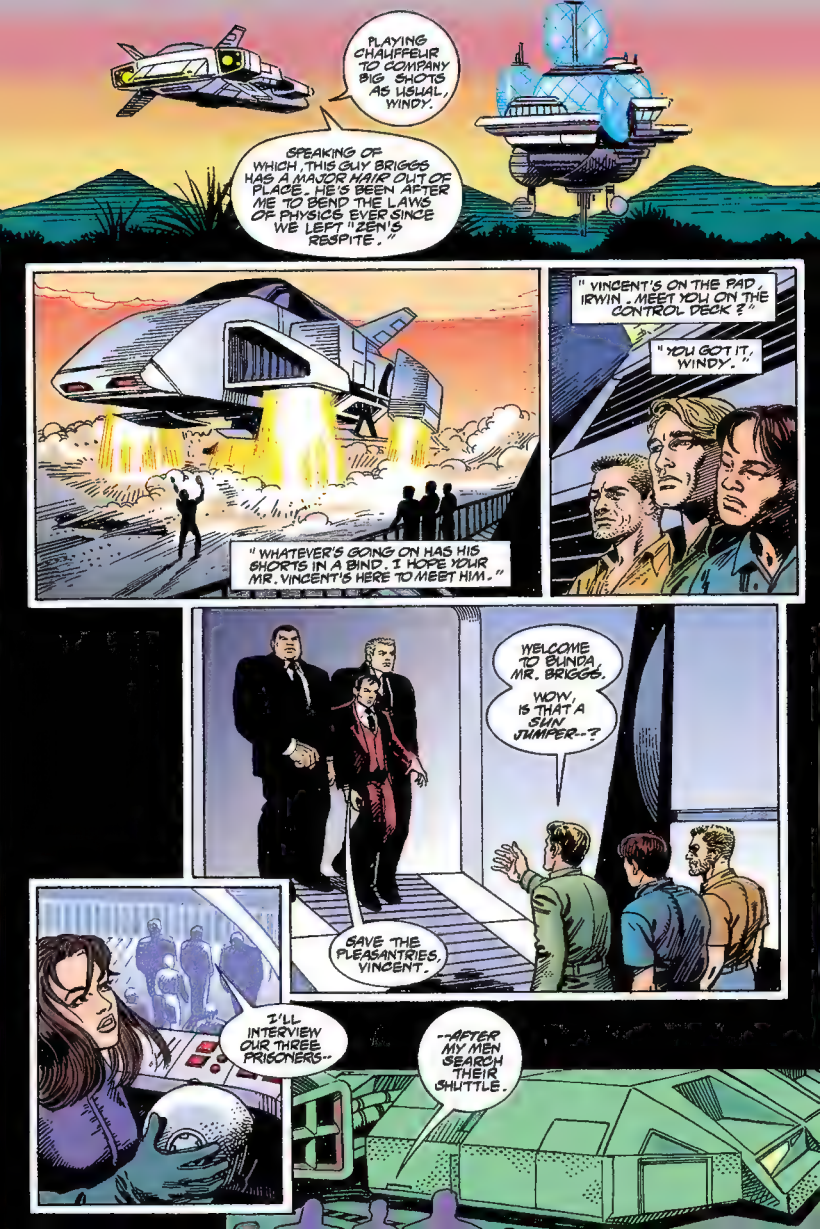
STILL, AS I LEARNED MYSELF, NOTHING MATCHES THE THRILL OF RISKING EVERYTHING AGAINST SUCCESS.
ESPECIALLY AGAINST AN ADVERSARY AS RESOURCEFUL AND AS ADAPTIVE AS THE BUGS.
ON EARTH, PEOPLE PAY SMALL FORTUNES TO ARTIFICIALLY EXPERIENCE A TASTE OF THE HYPERAWARENESS AND THE ADRENALINE-HIGH THAT COMES FROM PUTTING ONE'S LIFE ON THE LINE.
ALL IT IS, THOUGH, IS A TASTE.
THE REAL THING COMES WITH A MUCH HIGHER PRICE.

SHIK!

KRING

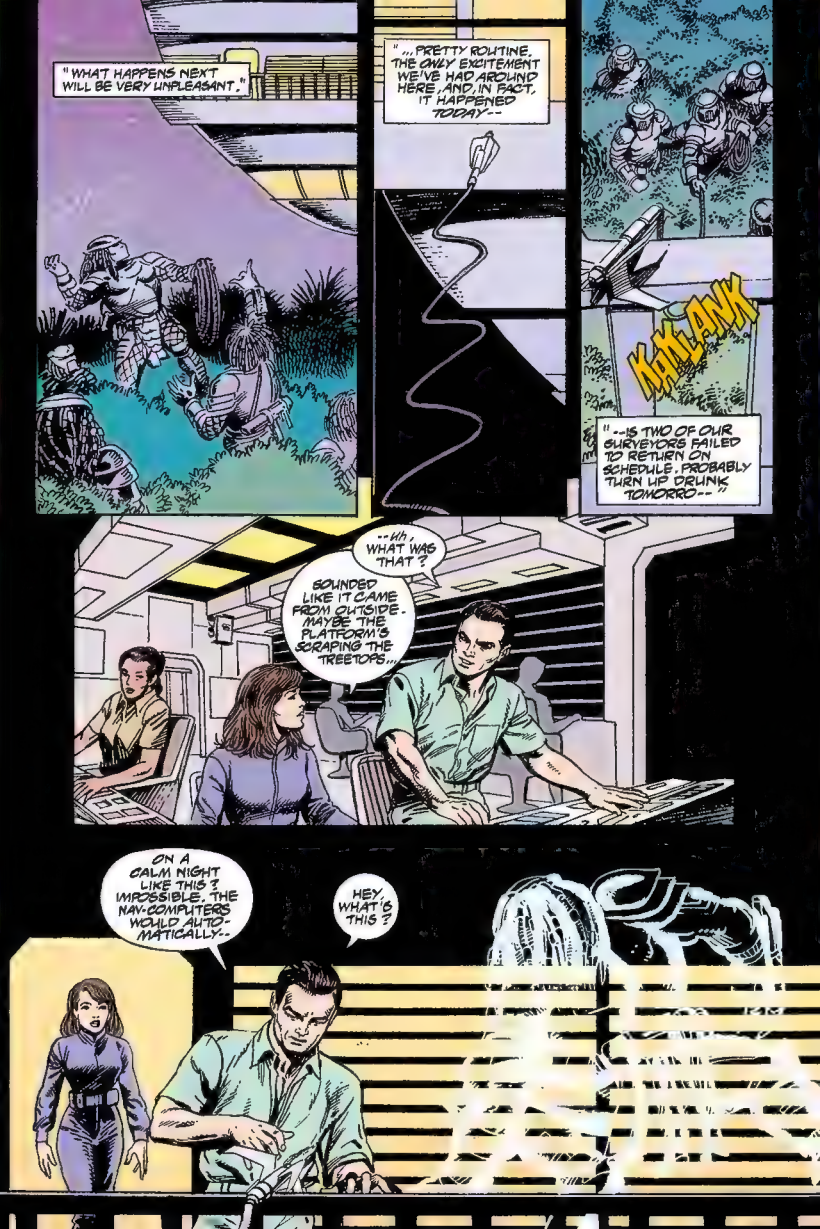
SHLUCH

KRICH
RROARR!
RROARR!
BHNDA SURVEY, THIS IS WY-1117 REQUESTING LANDING CLEARANCE.
" WY-1117, YOU'RE CLEARED FOR PAD THREE. IS THAT YOU, IRWIN? LONG TIME, NO SEE. WHAT BRINGS YOU WAY OUT HERE?"


PLAYING CHAUFFEUR TO COMPANY BIG SHOTS AS USUAL, WINDY.
SPEAKING OF WHICH, THIS GUY BRIGGS HAS A MAJOR HAIR OUT OF PLACE. HE'S BEEN AFTER ME TO BEND THE LAWS OF PHYSICS EVER SINCE WE LEFT "ZEN'S RESPITE."
"WHATEVER'S GOING ON HAS HIS SHORTS IN A BIND. I HOPE YOUR MR. VINCENT'S HERE TO MEET HIM."
"VINCENT'S ON THE PAD, IRWIN. MEET YOU ON THE CONTROL DECK?"
"YOU GOT IT, WINDY."
WELCOME TO BUNDA, MR. BRIGGS.
WOW, IS THAT A SUN JUMPER--?
SAVE THE PLEASANTRIES, VINCENT.
I'LL INTERVIEW OUR THREE PRISONERS--
--AFTER MY MEN SEARCH THEIR SHUTTLE.

LARA, KATHERINE L
28 YEARS
HONORABLE DISCHARGE USCMC (LIEUTENANT)
B-LEVEL TRAINING IN COMMUNICATIONS AND ELECTRONICS.
E-LEVEL TRAINING IN SERIAL NAVIGATION.
W-749352 (NEMESIS)
C2
JESS, MARTIN A
30 YEARS
DISHONORABLE DISCHARGE USCMC INFO.
NO TRAINING HIGHER THAN D-LEVEL.
W-749352 (NEMESIS)
D7 — POSSIBLE SECURITY RISK
ELLIS, BRIAN K.
24 YEARS
TECH. A-LEVEL TRAINING IN ROBOTICS, ELECTRONICS, SYNTHETIC REPAIR.
W-749352 (NEMESIS)
C2
MY NAME IS BRIGGS. THE COMPANY HAS AUTHORIZED ME TO MAKE YOU AN OFFER.
AS SOLE SURVIVORS OF THE NEMESIS, THE THREE OF YOU WILL BE ALLOWED TO SPLIT THE ENTIRE CREW'S BONUS FROM THAT JOB--
--PROVIDED YOU TURN OVER THE DATA RECOVERED FROM TERMINAL 949'S COMPUTER.
ALL WE WANT IS SAFE PASSAGE BACK TO--
CERTAINLY, WHATEVER YOU WANT, MS. LARA. JUST TELL ME WHERE THAT DATA IS.
HOW DO WE KNOW YOU'LL LIVE UP TO YOUR END OF THE AGREEMENT, BRIGGS?
THE COMPANY'S BEEN KNIFING US IN THE BACK EVERY TIME WE TURN AROU--
JESS!
NO, LARA. I'M OUT. HE'S ASKING US TO JUST FORGET ABOUT TEAPE, PULASKI, AND THAT POOR BASTARD IN THE MAX-X
A MOBILE ASSAULT EXO-WARRIOR.
NOT TO MENTION ALL OF THOSE PEOPLE ON 949.

SURELY YOU UNDERSTAND HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR THE COMPANY TO MAINTAIN ITS EDGE OVER THE COMPETITION.
THE ALIEN AND ITS POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS, ARE IMPORTANT TO OUR MILITARY DIVISION.
BUT NOBODY WILL BUY WHAT WE'RE SELLING UNLESS WE CAN SUPPLY THEM WITH DOCUMENTATION OF THE PRODUCT'S EFFECTIVENESS.
SUCH DOCUMENTATION REQUIRES A NUMBER OF VERY SENSITIVE EXPERIMENTS, CARRIED OUT IN THE UTMOST SECRECY.
TERMINAL 949 IS A CASE IN POINT. IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR OUR CUSTOMERS TO KNOW EXACTLY HOW FAST ALIEN INFESTATION SPREADS THROUGH AN ISOLATED COMMUNITY.
WHAT?
BUT-- 949 HAD OVER 400 PEOPLE ON BOARD!
BELIEVE ME, USING 949 WAS NOT A DECISION THAT WAS MADE LIGHTLY.
THE COMPANY HAD SEVERAL BILLION DOLLARS INVESTED IN THAT INSTALLATION.
"INSTALLATION"?! WHAT ABOUT THE LIVES OF ALL THOSE PEOPLE?
I WAS AFRAID IT MIGHT COME TO THIS, KEENE, NIRASAWA.
YOU SHOULD HAVE COOPERATED.

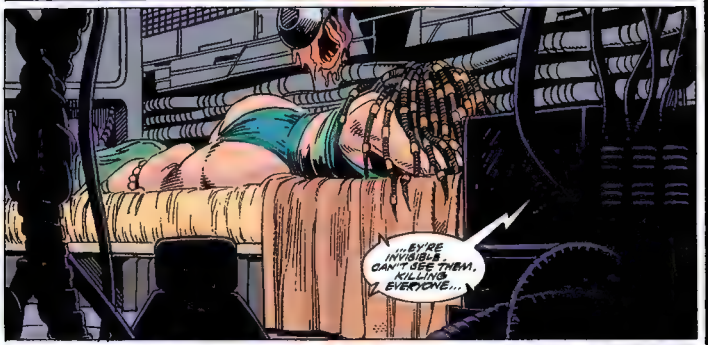

"WHAT HAPPENS NEXT WILL BE VERY UNPLEASANT."
"...PRETTY ROUTINE. THE ONLY EXCITEMENT WE'VE HAD AROUND HERE, AND, IN FACT, IT HAPPENED TODAY--
KAKLANK
"--IS TWO OF OUR SURVEYORS FAILED TO RETURN ON SCHEDULE. PROBABLY TURN UP DRUNK TOMORRO--"
--WH, WHAT WAS THAT?
SOUNDED LIKE IT CAME FROM OUTSIDE. MAYBE THE PLATFORM'S SCRAPING THE TREETOPS...
ON A CALM NIGHT LIKE THIS? IMPOSSIBLE. THE NAV-COMPUTERS WOULD AUTO-MATICALLY--
HEY, WHAT'S THIS?

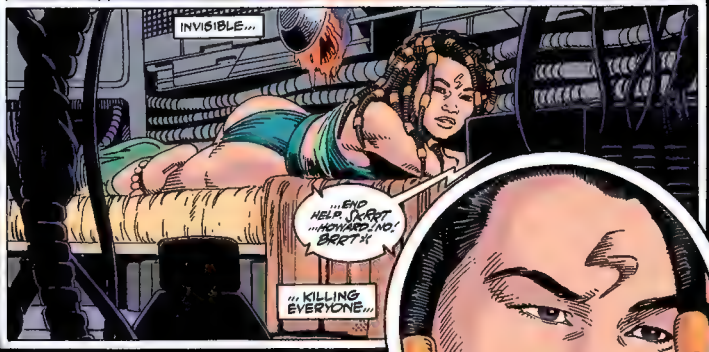
OH, MY... WINDY!
SLURK
HUK!
SOUND THE ALARM!
HUH?
KUFF
ONCE MORE, NIRASAWA.
IT'S A SHAME YOUR FRIEND HAS TO ENDURE THIS, MR. ELLIS.
OF COURSE. A WORD FROM YOU COULD END HIS SUFFERING...

VINCENT-- WHAT'S GOING ON?
I-I DON'T KNOW... THE WHOLE PLATFORM'S LISTING! NOTHING LIKE THIS COULD HAPPEN--
--UNLESS THE MAIN CONTROLS WERE DAMAGED!
SHOW ME.
KEENE, KEEP AN EYE ON OUR PRISONERS.
NIRASAWA, COME WITH ME.
HEY, KEENE... :COUGH: YOU'RE GONNA GET LEFT BEHIND WHEN THE RATS DESERT THE SHIP.
STAY ON THE FLOOR, AND I WON'T HAVE TO KILL--
YO--KKKK
SMSK

Y-YOU KILLED HIM!
BUT, HOW--?
TRAINING. I USED TO BE A MARINE.
OH, YEAH. I FORGOT.
SO DID HE. COME ON, HELP ME--
I LOOK UPON YOU WITH NEW EYES, LARA.
YEAH, WELL I WAS GETTING TIRED OF WAITING FOR YOU TO MAKE YOUR MOVE. SO NOW WHAT?
YOU HAVE TO ASK? WE REV UP THE ENGINES ON THIS THING AND BLAST THE HELL OUT OF HERE.
NO GOOD. WE WERE RUNNING ON FUMES WHEN WE LANDED.
COME ON, ELLIS. REFUELING TAKES TWO.

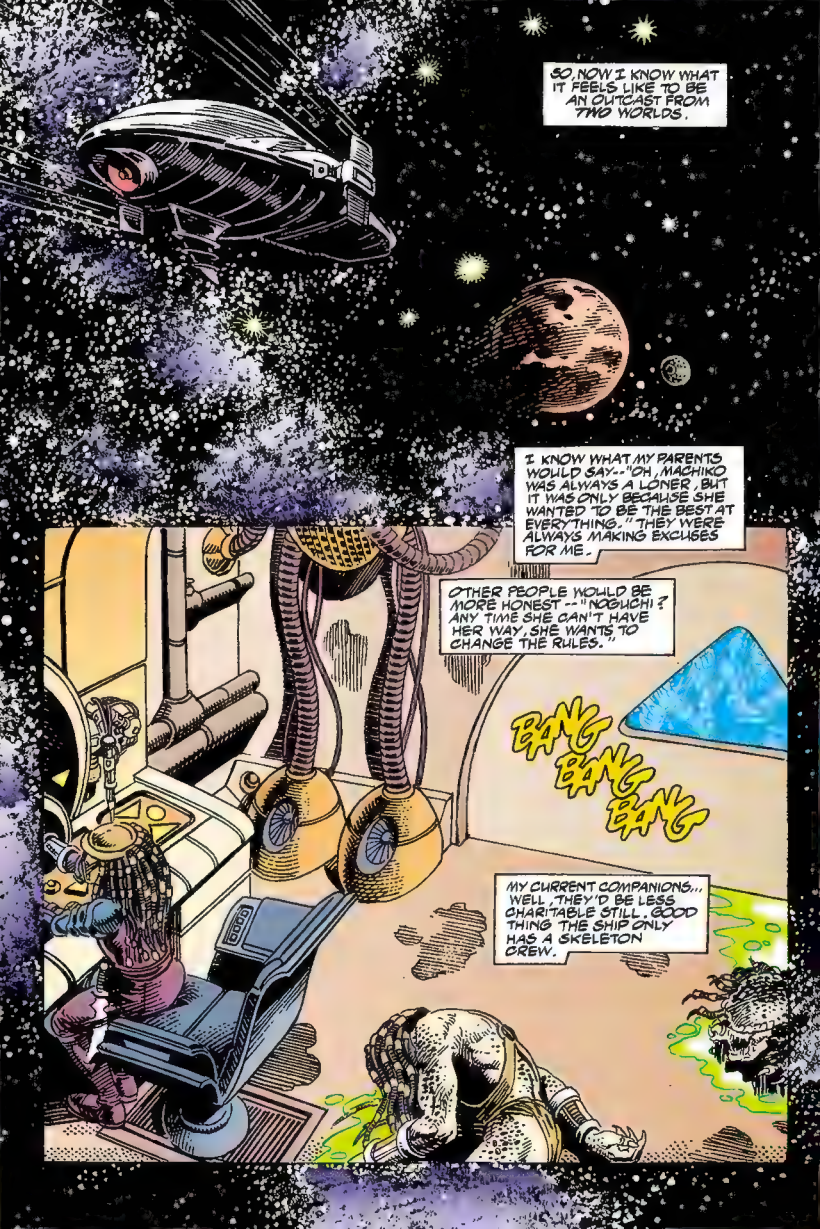
...HNDA SURVEY... WE ARE UNDER ATTACK. MAIN STABILIZERS GONE... BZZT ...OSING POWER. VRRT...DART, THIS IS BHNDA SURVEY. WE ARE UNDER ATTACK...

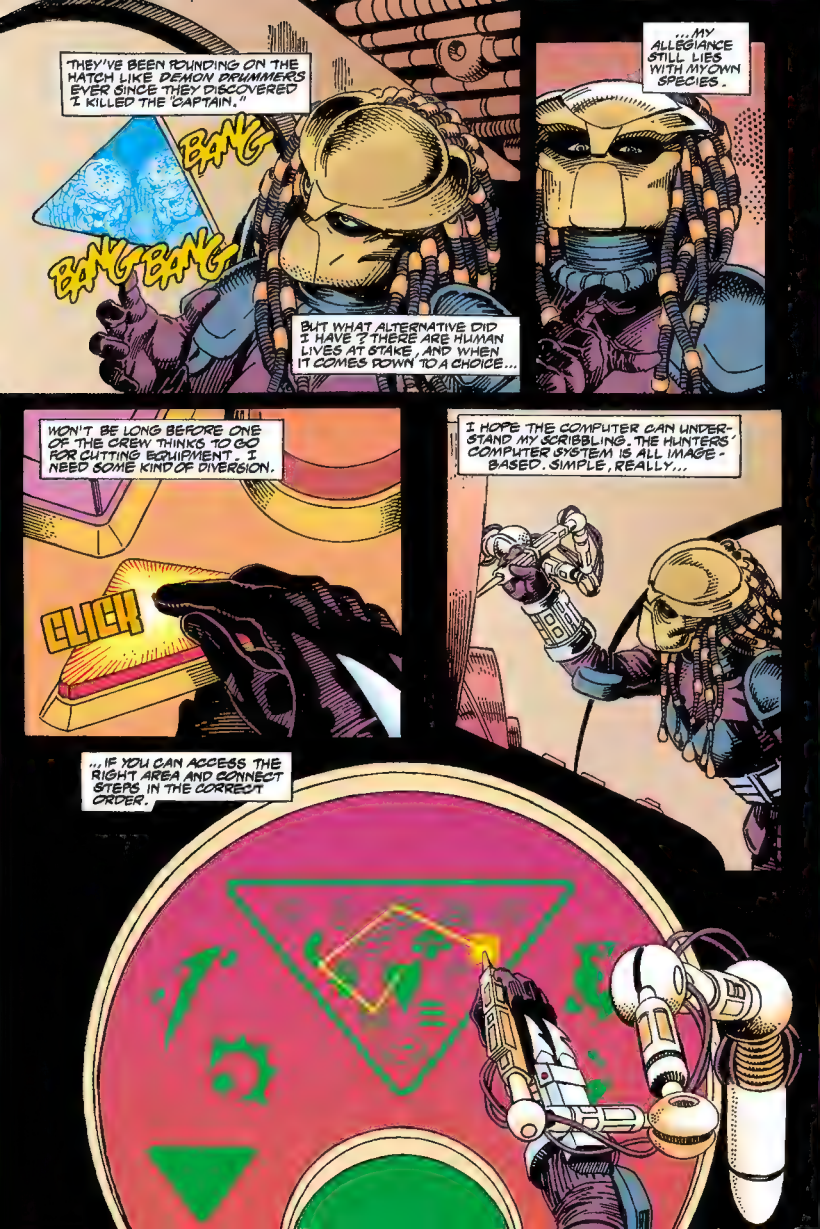

...EY'RE INVISIBLE. CAN'T SEE THEM. KILLING EVERYONE...

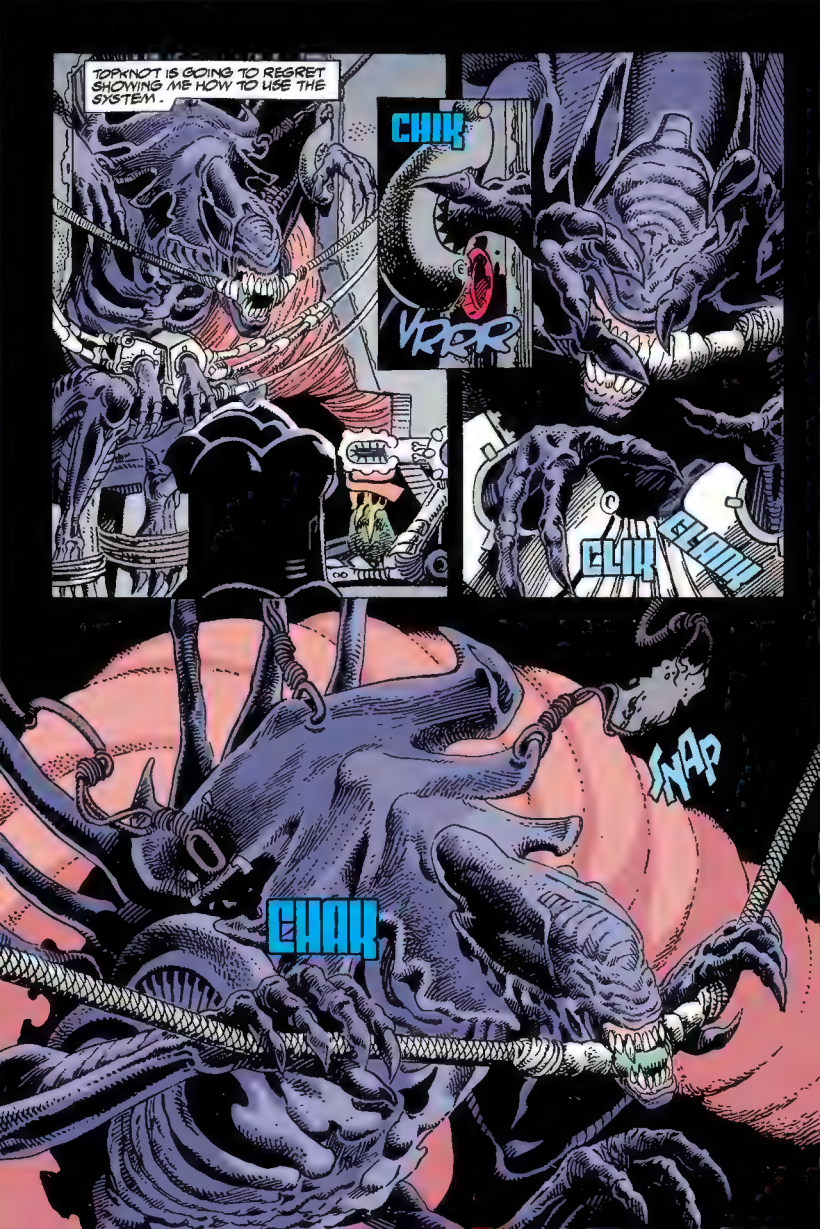

INVISIBLE...
...END HELP. JARRT ...HOWARD! NO! BRRT!
...KILLING EVERYONE...

SURE, IT'S CRAZY.
BUT WHAT CHOICE DO I HAVE?
EVEN THOUGH I'M WITH THE HUNTERS, I'M STILL HUMAN.
I CAN'T STAND BY AND DO NOTHING.

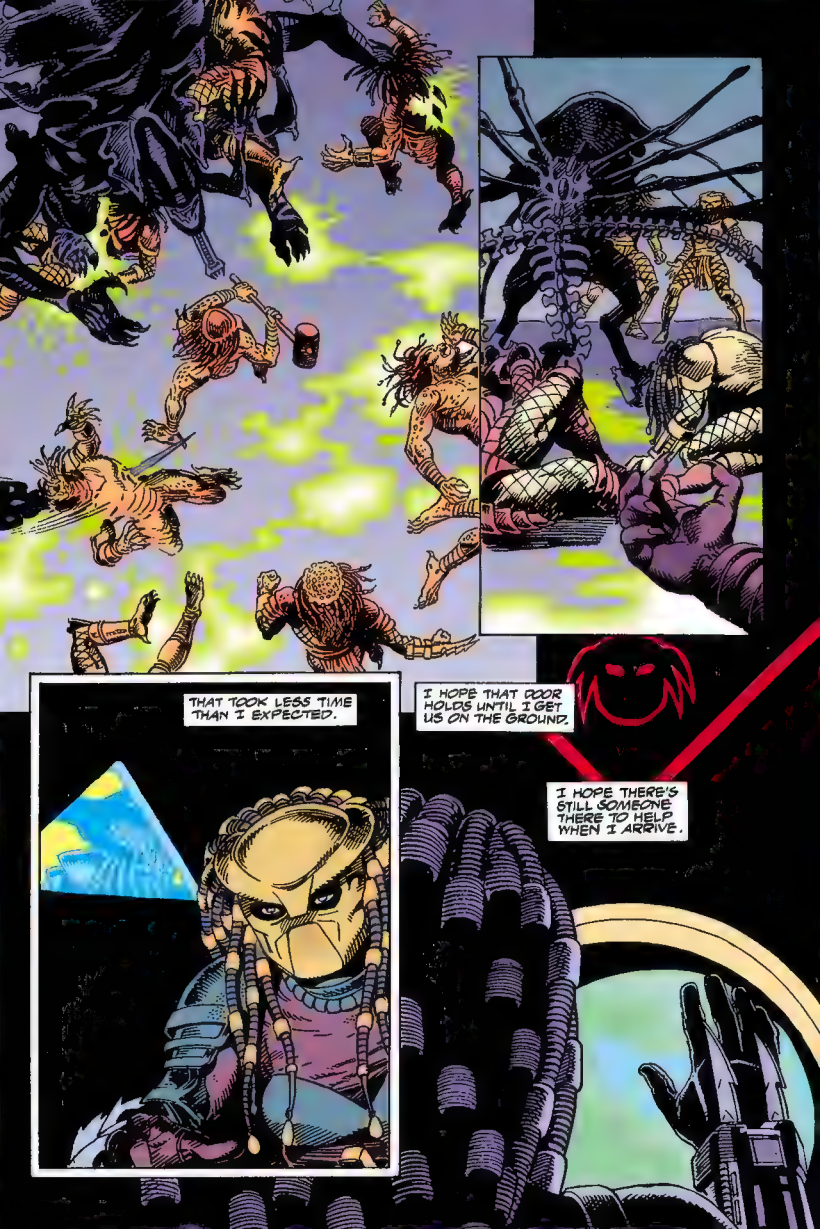
SWIK
HUNK
ANYWAY, THERE'S NO TURNING BACK NOW.

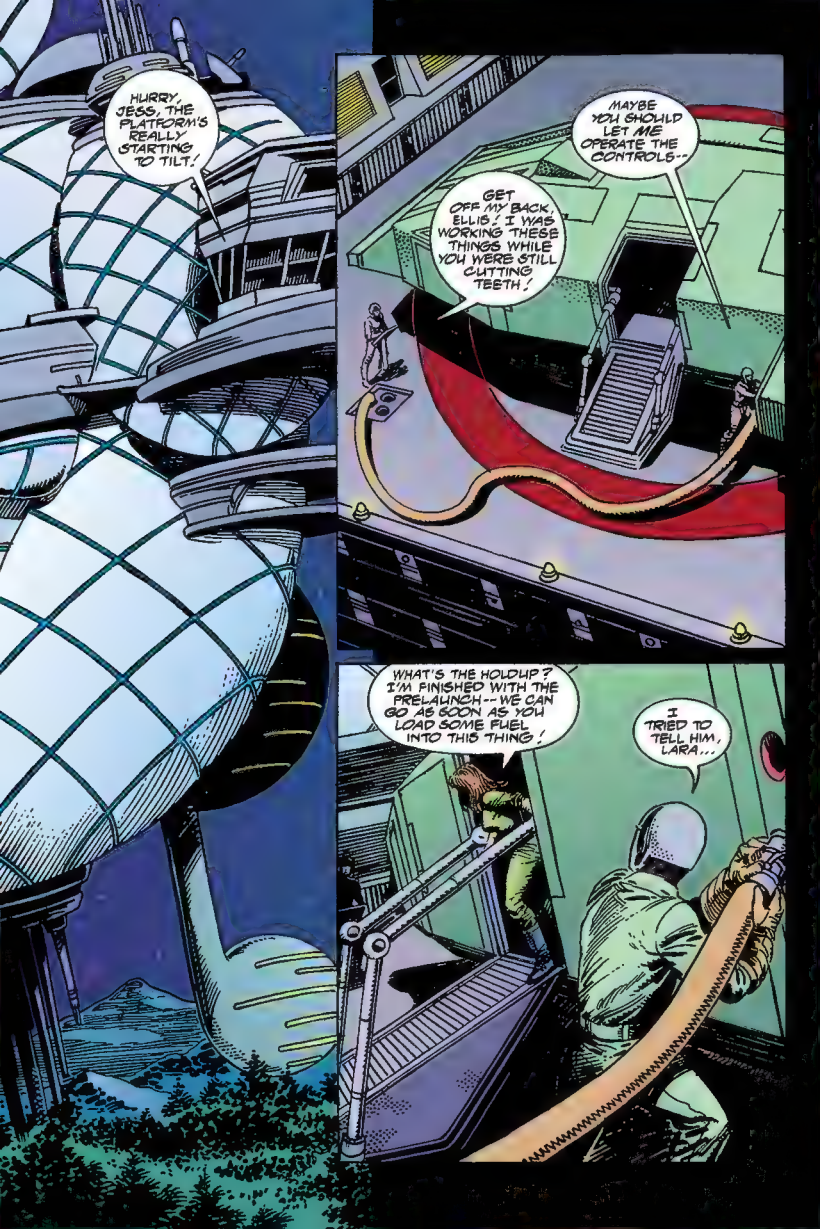

SO NOW I KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE AN OUTCAST FROM TWO WORLDS.
I KNOW WHAT MY PARENTS WOULD SAY--"OH, MACHIKO WAS ALWAYS A LONER, BUT IT WAS ONLY BECAUSE SHE WANTED TO BE THE BEST AT EVERYTHING." THEY WERE ALWAYS MAKING EXCUSES FOR ME.
OTHER PEOPLE WOULD BE MORE HONEST --"NOGUCHI? ANY TIME SHE CAN'T HAVE HER WAY, SHE WANTS TO CHANGE THE RULES."
BANG BANG BANG
MY CURRENT COMPANIONS... WELL, THEY'D BE LESS CHARITABLE STILL. GOOD THING THE SHIP ONLY HAS A SKELETON CREW.


"THEY'VE BEEN POUNDING ON THE HATCH LIKE DEMON DRUMMERS EVER SINCE THEY DISCOVERED I KILLED THE CAPTAIN."
BANG
BANG BANG
BUT WHAT ALTERNATIVE DID I HAVE? THERE ARE HUMAN LIVES AT STAKE, AND WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO A CHOICE...
...MY ALLEGIANCE STILL LIES WITH MY OWN SPECIES.
WON'T BE LONG BEFORE ONE OF THE CREW THINKS TO GO FOR CUTTING EQUIPMENT. I NEED SOME KIND OF DIVERSION.
CLICK
I HOPE THE COMPUTER CAN UNDERSTAND MY SCRIBBLING. THE HUNTERS' COMPUTER SYSTEM IS ALL IMAGE-BASED. SIMPLE, REALLY...
...IF YOU CAN ACCESS THE RIGHT AREA AND CONNECT STEPS IN THE CORRECT ORDER.


TOPKNOT IS GOING TO REGRET SHOWING ME HOW TO USE THE SYSTEM.
CHIK
VRROR
CLIK
CHAK
SNAP
CHAK

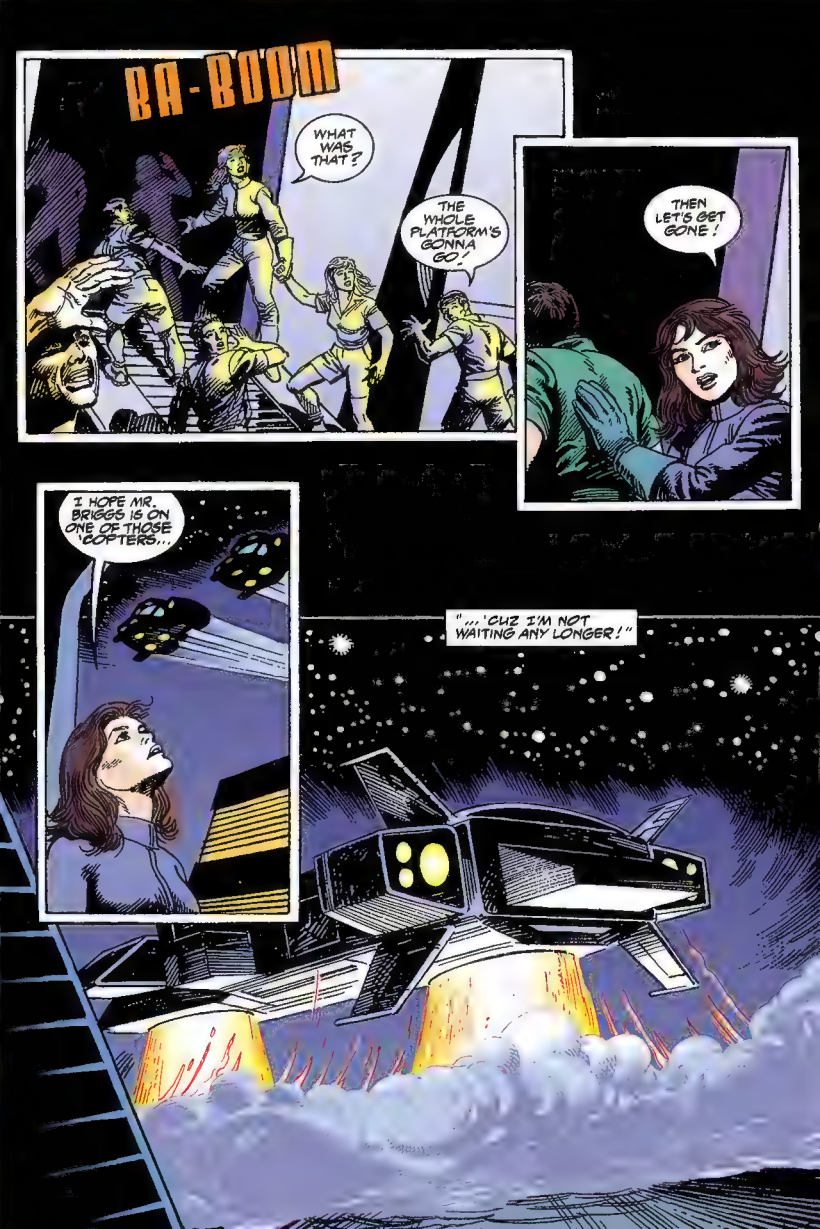
(RAAARGH!)


THAT TOOK LESS TIME THAN I EXPECTED.
I HOPE THAT DOOR HOLDS UNTIL I GET US ON THE GROUND.
I HOPE THERE'S STILL SOMEONE THERE TO HELP WHEN I ARRIVE.


HURRY, JESS, THE PLATFORM'S REALLY STARTING TO TILT!
MAYBE YOU SHOULD LET ME OPERATE THE CONTROLS--
GET OFF MY BACK, ELLIS! I WAS WORKING THESE THINGS WHILE YOU WERE STILL CUTTING TEETH!
WHAT'S THE HOLDUP? I'M FINISHED WITH THE PRELAUNCH--WE CAN GO AS SOON AS YOU LOAD SOME FUEL INTO THIS THING!
I TRIED TO TELL HIM, LARA...

BRIGGS COULD COME BACK ANY SECOND!
YEAH? I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT--
--AFTER THE WAY YOU TOOK OUT HIS MAN KEENE.
NOW, LET ME WORK...
LESSEE... FLOW RATE... SET TO MAX. FILTERS... SET. MIXTURE... SET.
DONE! FILL 'ER UP, ELLIS!
ABOUT TIME... HUH? WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?
JESS! LOOK OUT!
WHA--? HGH!

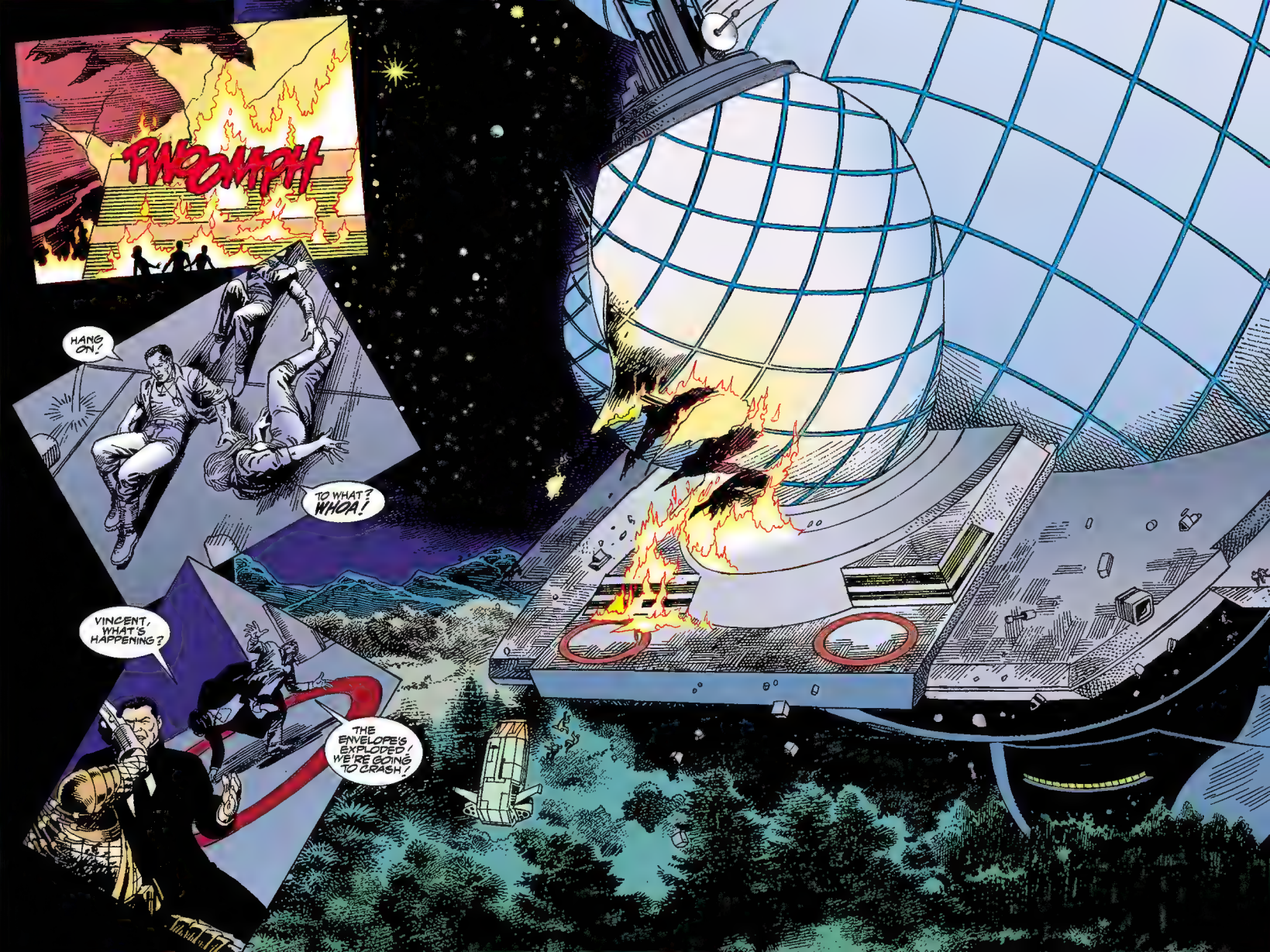
STAY RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE. I-I'M WARNING YOU...
(GRRRR!)
ALL RIGHT, YOU ASKED FOR IT--
WHOA!
PWOOSH
(HWRK?)
(HWR?)

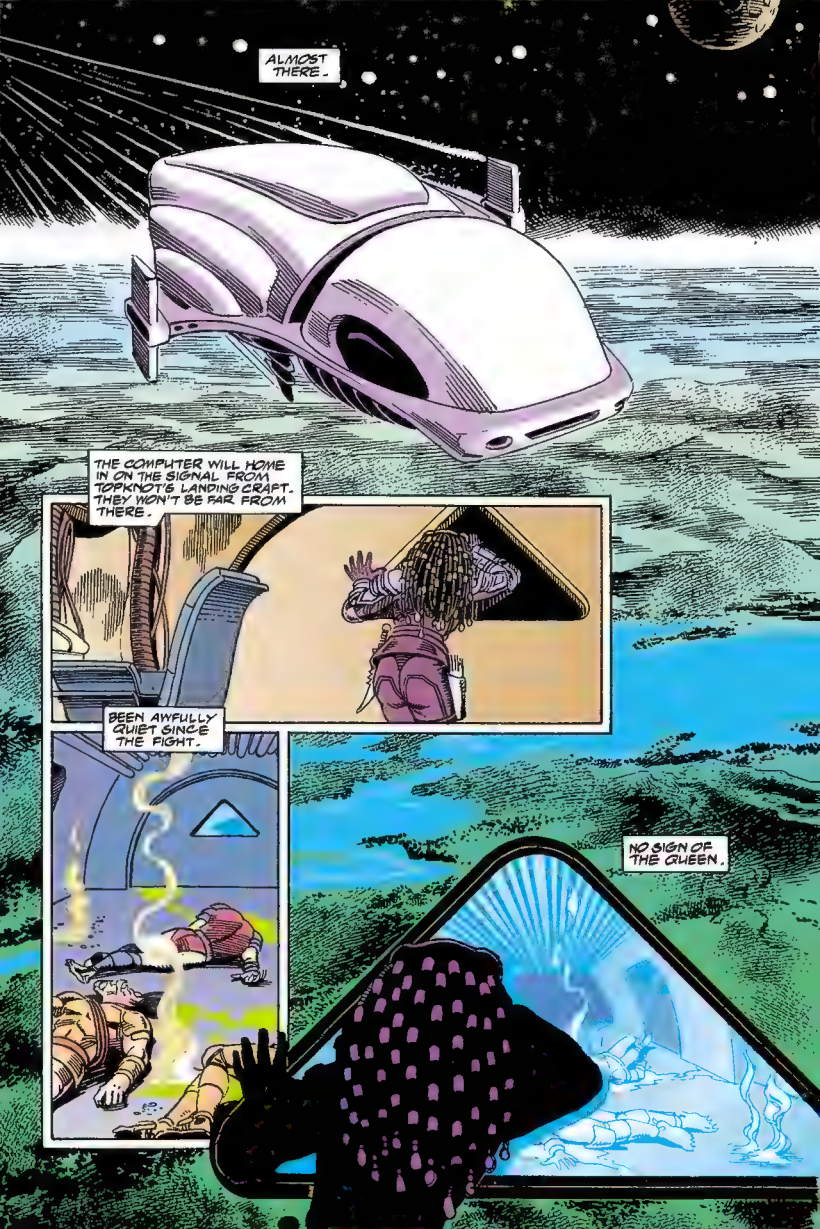

BA-BOOM
WHAT WAS THAT?
THE WHOLE PLATFORM'S GONNA GO!
THEN LET'S GET GONE!
I HOPE MR. BRIGGS IS ON ONE OF THOSE 'COPTERS...
"...'CUZ I'M NOT WAITING ANY LONGER!"

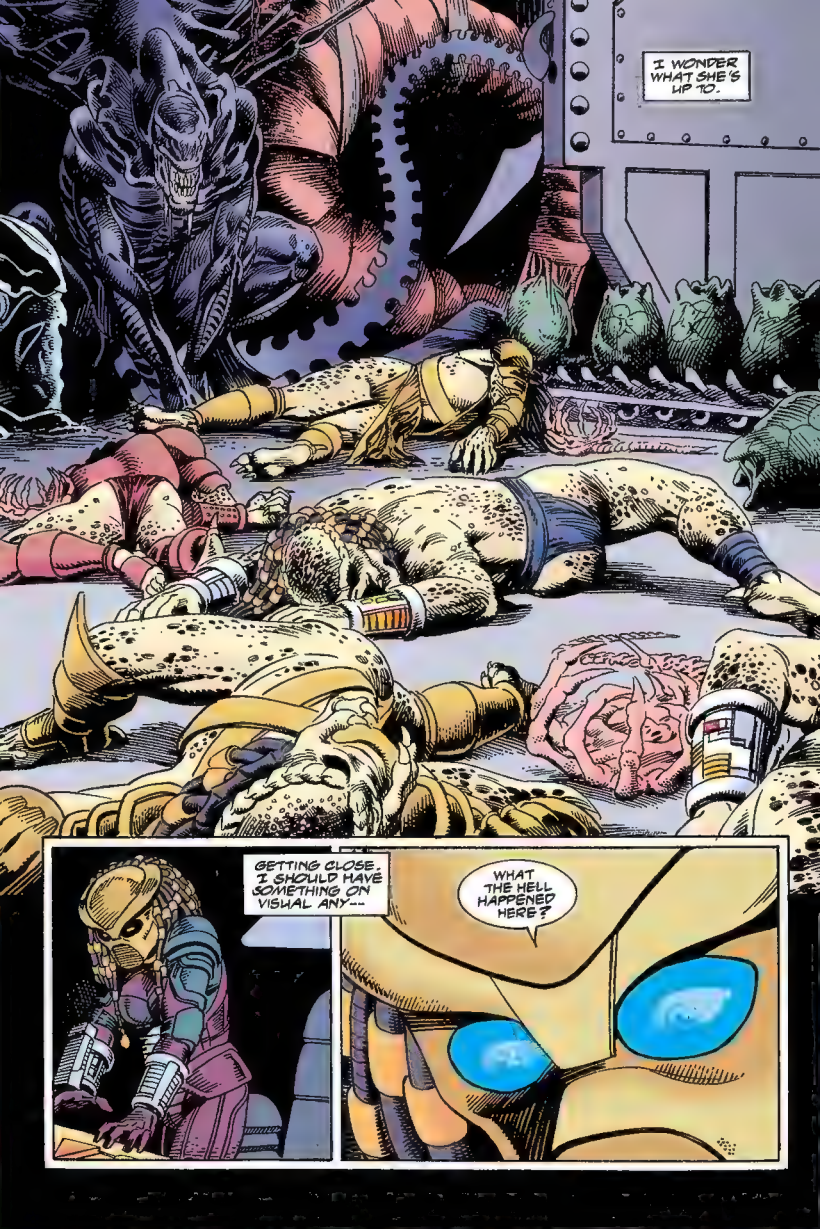
I-I DON'T KNOW.
NIRASAWA. THE PLATFORM IS UNDER ATTACK BY PERSON--OR PERSONS--UNKNOWN. GET ME BACK TO THE NEMESIS SHUTTLE BY THE FASTEST POSSIBLE ROUTE.
YES, MR. BRIGGS.
BA-BOOM
THE WHOLE PLATFORM'S GOING TO CRASH.
THANK YOU FOR THAT DEDUCTION, VINCENT.
THINK ABOUT IT. YOUR SURVEY HAS TURNED UP NOTHING OF PARTICULAR VALUE ON BUNDA, RIGHT?
YET SOMEONE HAS DEEMED IT NECESSARY TO ATTACK YOUR SURVEY PLATFORM AND KILL YOUR PEOPLE. WHY?
I-I DON'T KNOW.
IT'S OBVIOUS. THEY'RE AFTER THE SAME INFORMATION I AM--THE DATA THAT THE NEMESIS TEAM RETRIEVED FROM TERMINAL 949.

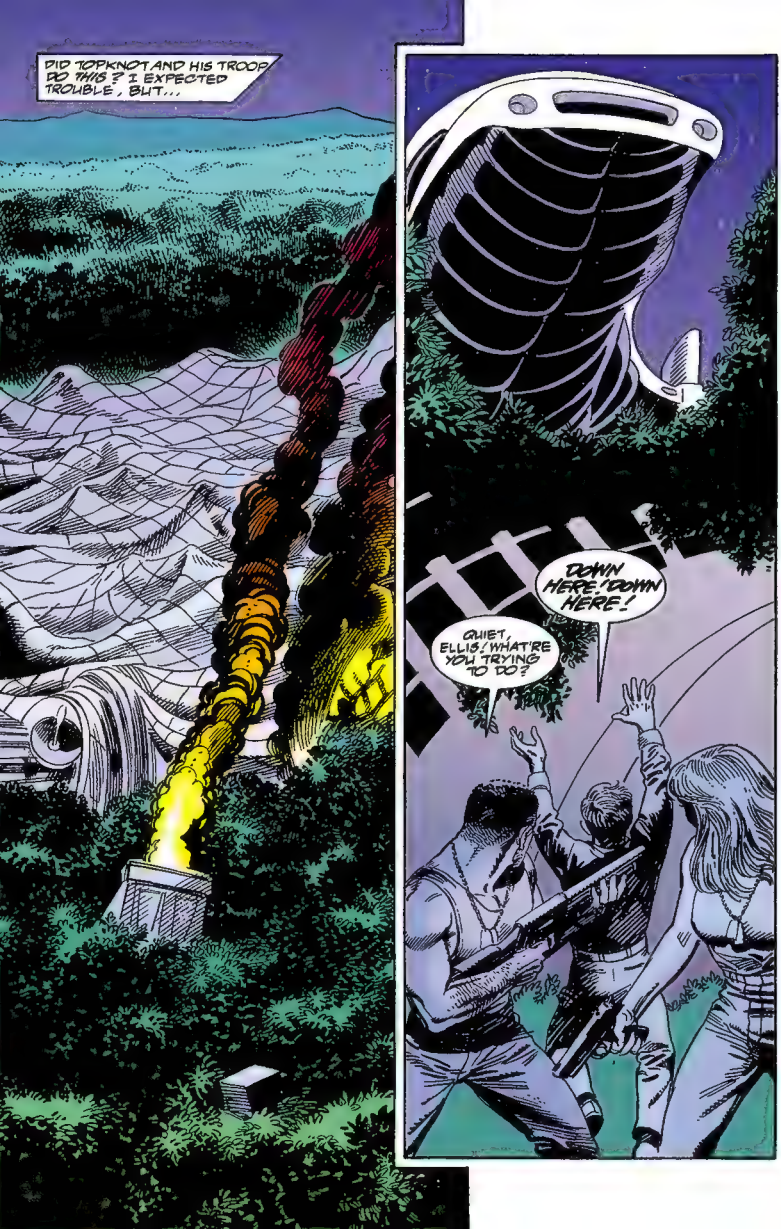
DO YOU THINK THE COMPANY IS THE ONLY ENTITY INTERESTED IN THE PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF "CANCER BLACK"?
UH, SIR--
--TROUBLE.
TA-TUMP
W-WHAT IS IT?
YOU MEAN WHO. CORPORATE WILL WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THIS... THIS "CLOAKING DEVICE," OR WHATEVER IT IS.
I'LL HOLD HIM, MR. BRIGGS...
...YOU GET TO YOUR SUN JUMPER--heh!

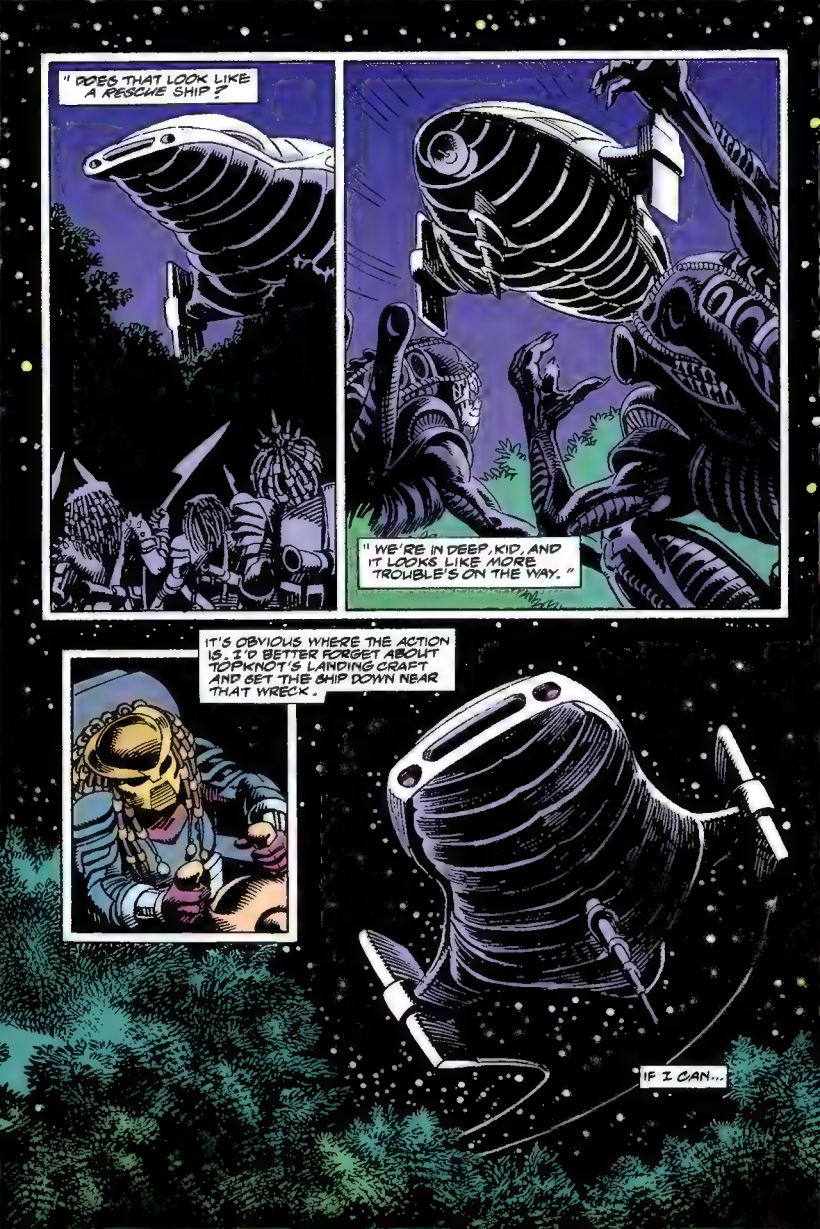
I SUPPOSE THAT MAKES SENSE. THE GHA DATA WON'T DO ME ANY GOOD IF I'M DEAD.
B-BUT...
YOU TAKE POINT, VINCENT.
BUT TO WHERE? THERE GOES YOUR SHIP!
DAMN IRWIN! I'LL HAVE HER HIDE FOR THIS!
YOU OKAY, JESS?
DAMN, ELLIS! YA EVER HEARD THE WORD "OVERKILL"?
WHAT DID YOU DO?
I THINK I KILLED HIS.


FWOMPH
HANG ON!
TO WHAT? WHOA!
VINCENT, WHAT'S HAPPENING?
THE ENVELOPE'S EXPLODED! WE'RE GOING TO CRASH!

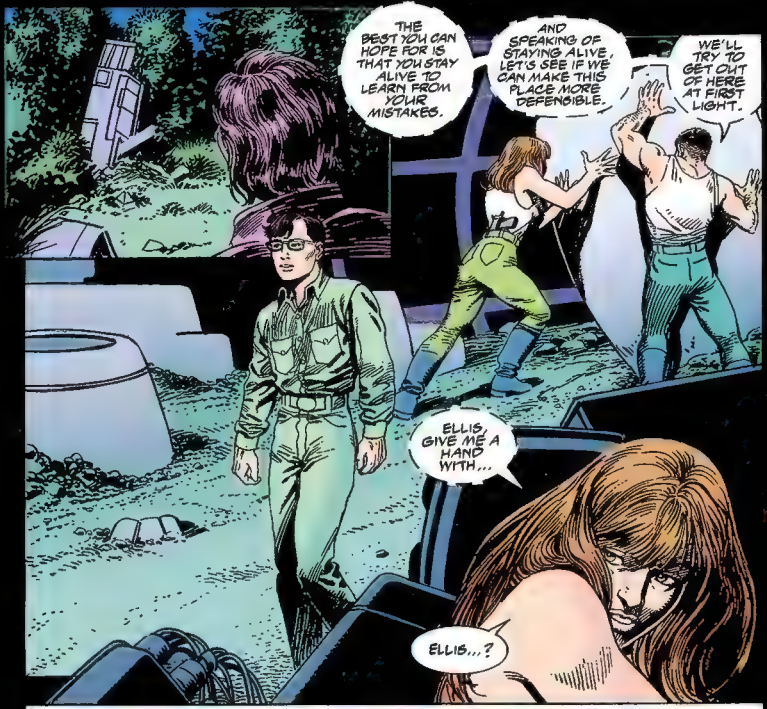

ALMOST THERE.
THE COMPUTER WILL HOME IN ON THE SIGNAL FROM TOPKNOT'S LANDING CRAFT. THEY WON'T BE FAR FROM THERE.
BEEN AWFULLY QUIET SINCE THE FIGHT.
NO SIGN OF THE QUEEN.


I WONDER WHAT SHE'S UP TO.
GETTING CLOSE. I SHOULD HAVE SOMETHING ON VISUAL ANY--
WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED HERE?


DID TOPKNOT AND HIS TROOP DO THIS? I EXPECTED TROUBLE, BUT...
DOWN HERE! DOWN HERE!
QUIET, ELLIS! WHAT'RE YOU TRYING TO DO?

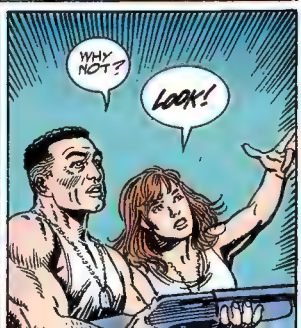

" DOES THAT LOOK LIKE A RESCUE SHIP ?
" WE'RE IN DEEP, KID, AND IT LOOKS LIKE MORE TROUBLE'S ON THE WAY. "
IT'S OBVIOUS WHERE THE ACTION IS. I'D BETTER FORGET ABOUT TOPKNOT'S LANDING CRAFT AND GET THE SHIP DOWN NEAR THAT WRECK.
IF I CAN...

MAYBE I WAS WRONG... LOOKS LIKE IT'S GOING AWAY.
THAT DOESN'T HELP US, WHOEVER ATTACKED THE PLATFORM IS STILL OUT THERE.
YEAH, BUT THEY DON'T KNOW THEY'RE UP AGAINST A COUPLE OF EX-COLONIAL MARINES.
THIS IS ALL MY FAULT.
THAT'S NOT TRUE! YOU SAVED OUR LIVES BACK ON 949 WHEN YOU GOT INTO THAT M.A.X. SUIT.
AND YOU SAVED MY BUTT AGAIN TONIGHT--
YEAH, AND BLEW UP THE WHOLE PLATFORM DOING IT!
LARA, YOU AND JESS HAVE HAD TRAINING FOR THIS KIND OF STUFF. YOU'D BE BETTER OFF IF YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT ME.
YOU ONLY DID WHAT YOU HAD TO.
BUT EITHER ONE OF YOU WOULD'VE DONE IT BETTER!
SO YOU MADE A MISTAKE. WE ALL HAVE. YOU CAN'T CHANGE THE PAST.


THE BEST YOU CAN HOPE FOR IS THAT YOU STAY ALIVE TO LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES.
AND SPEAKING OF STAYING ALIVE, LET'S SEE IF WE CAN MAKE THIS PLACE MORE DEFENSIBLE.
WE'LL TRY TO GET OUT OF HERE AT FIRST LIGHT.
ELLIS, GIVE ME A HAND WITH...
ELLIS...?

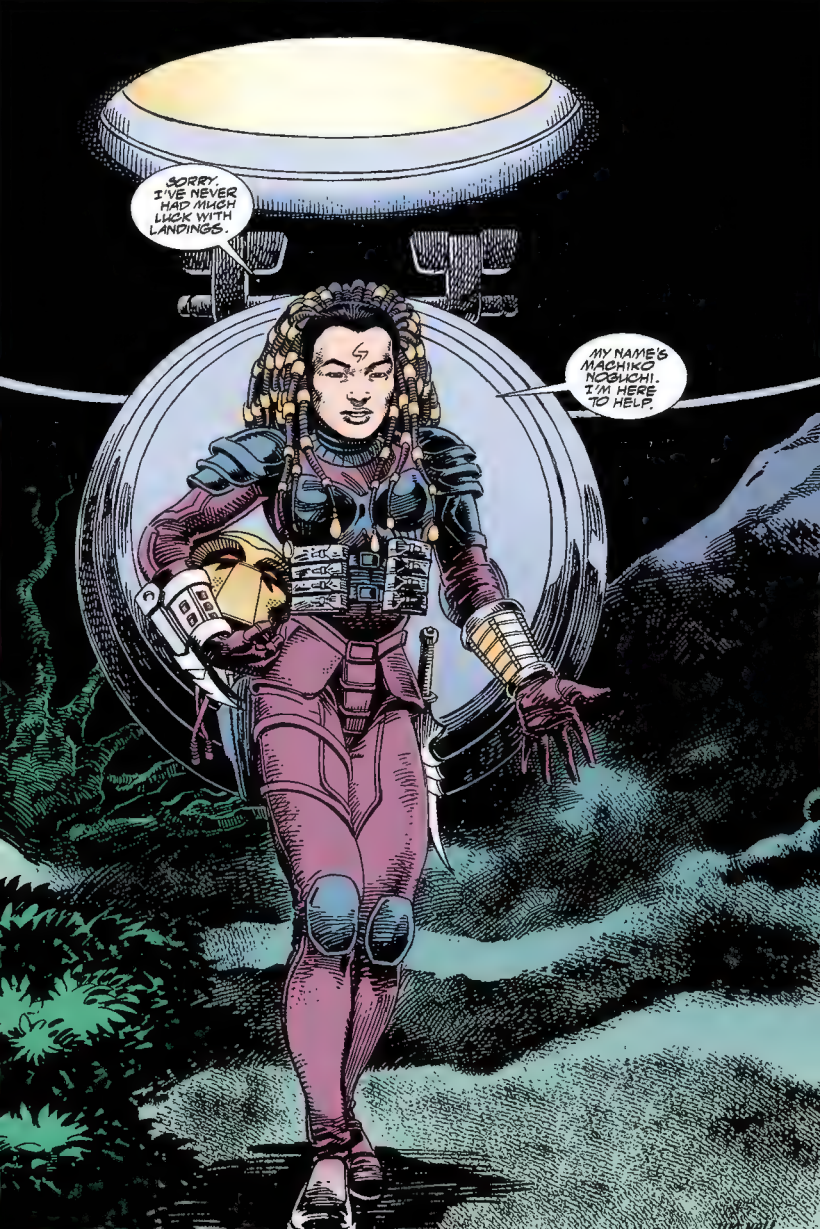
ELLIS!
AW, NOW WHAT?
COME BACK HERE!

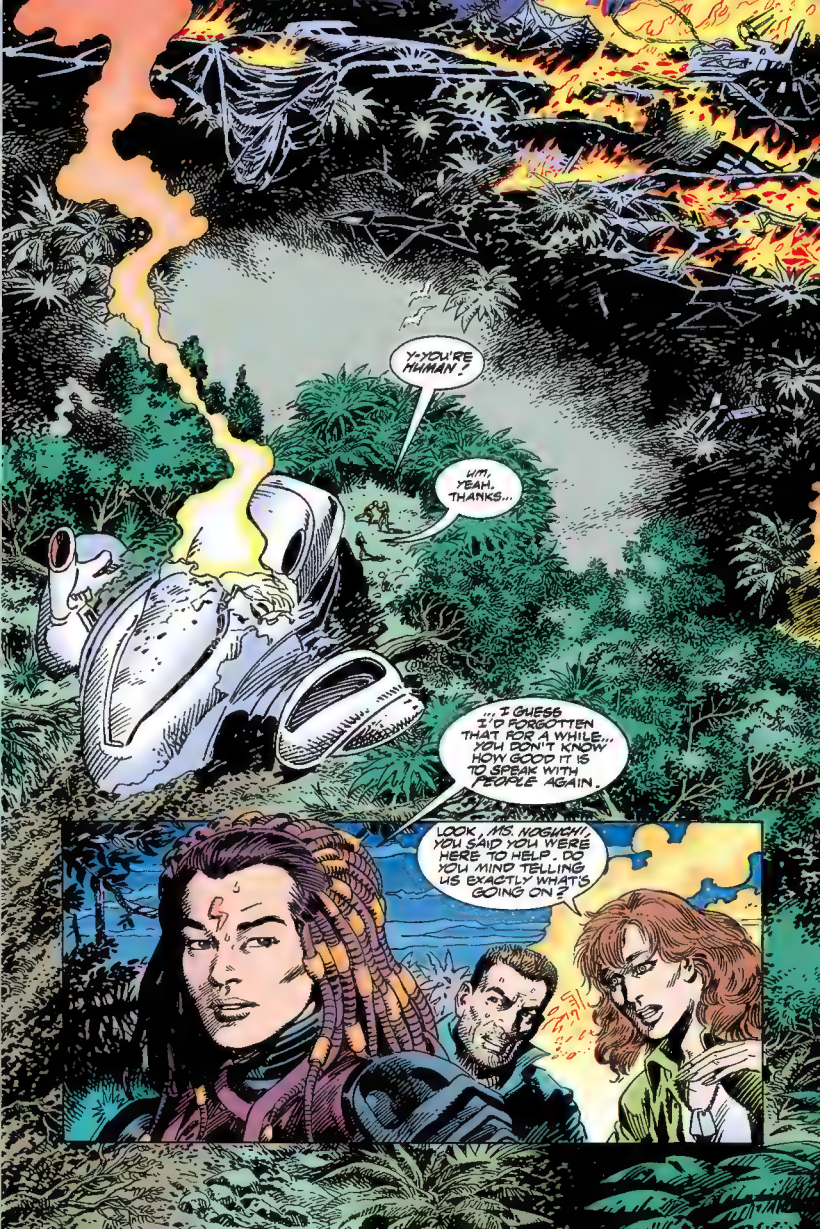
STUPID KID! I'LL GO GET-- HUH?
NO!


WHY NOT?
LOOK!

RUN!

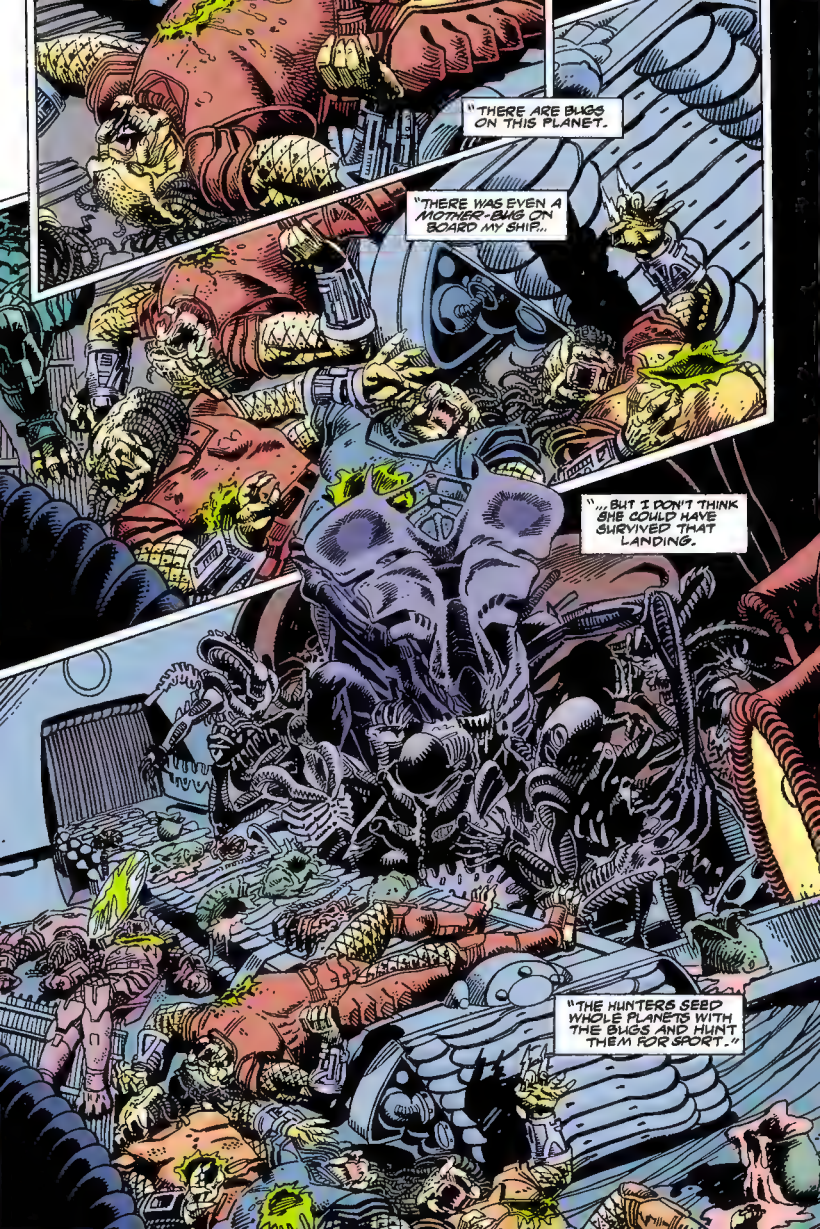
THAT WAS CLOSE.
KLANK
WHA--?
DON'T SHOOT.


SORRY. I'VE NEVER HAD MUCH LUCK WITH LANDINGS.
MY NAME'S MACHIKO NOGUCHI. I'M HERE TO HELP.


Y-YOU'RE HUMAN!
UM, YEAH. THANKS...
... I GUESS I'D FORGOTTEN THAT FOR A WHILE... YOU DON'T KNOW HOW GOOD IT IS TO SPEAK WITH PEOPLE AGAIN.
LOOK, MS. NOGUCHI, YOU SAID YOU WERE HERE TO HELP. DO YOU MIND TELLING US EXACTLY WHAT'S GOING ON?

IT'S KIND OF A LONG STORY. LET'S JUST SAY I HEARD THAT PEOPLE ON THIS PLANET-- ON BANDA-- WERE IN TROUBLE.
I HAD TO CHOOSE WHICH SIDE I WAS GOING TO BE ON-- THE HUNTERS' OR YOURS.
THE HUNTERS? YOU MEAN THE INVISIBLE GUYS WHO ATTACKED THE SURVEY PLATFORM?
YOU WERE WITH THEM? BUT THEY'RE NOT HUMAN, ARE THEY?
YES. FOR OVER A YEAR. AND NO, THEY'RE NOT...
I LEARNED THE HARD WAY THAT IT WAS A MISTAKE TO THINK A HUMAN BEING COULD ADAPT TO THEIR CULTURE.
NOW THEY'RE LEARNING JUST HOW BIG A MISTAKE IT WAS.
LOOK, I MADE QUITE AN ENTRANCE. IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE WE GET COMPANY.
ARE THERE ANY OTHER SURVIVORS? WE'VE GOT TO ROUND THEM UP AND FIND SOME COVER.
HM...
YOU TWO AREN'T THE ONLY SURVIVORS, ARE YOU?
THREE. THERE ARE THREE OF US, ACTUALLY. THERE MAY BE OTHERS, BUT...
I GUESS WE HAVE A "LONG STORY" OF OUR OWN.

I'M KATE LARA, THIS IS MARTIN JESS. THE THIRD MEMBER OF OUR GROUP IS BRIAN--
ELLIS. HE RAN OFF A BIT AGO--TRYIN' TO GET HIMSELF KILLED, NEAR AS I CAN TELL.
AS FOR ANY OTHERS, WE SAW A COUPLE OF 'COPTERS AND A SHUTTLE GET AWAY BEFORE THE PLATFORM CRASHED, SO MAYBE THEY ALL GOT TO SAFETY...
...BUT I HOPE NOT.
HE'S MAD BECAUSE THE PLATFORM'S SUPERVISOR HAD US ARRESTED--ON COMPANY ORDERS.
TELL HER WHY.
THERE ARE THESE CREATURES--ALIENS--HORRIBLE THINGS. THEY CAN ADAPT TO ANY ENVIRONMENT, AND THEY'VE BEEN DISCOVERED ALL OVER THE COLONIES.
JESS, ELLIS, AND I WERE PART OF AN EXTERMINATION TEAM THAT WAS SENT TO A SPACE STATION TO WIPE OUT AN INFESTATION. WHAT WE DIDN'T KNOW WAS THAT THE STATION HAD BEEN INFESTED BY THE COMPANY--
ON PURPOSE! THEY WANTED TO SEE HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE THE ALIENS TO KILL FOUR HUNDRED INNOCENT PEOPLE--MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN.
SOME OF THE HIGHER-UPS DIDN'T APPRECIATE THE FACT THAT WE BLEW THEIR DATA TO ATOMS, ALONG WITH THE STATION AND THE--
--BUGS.
YES, I KNOW ALL ABOUT BUGS. WE HAVE MORE IN COMMON THAN YOU KNOW.

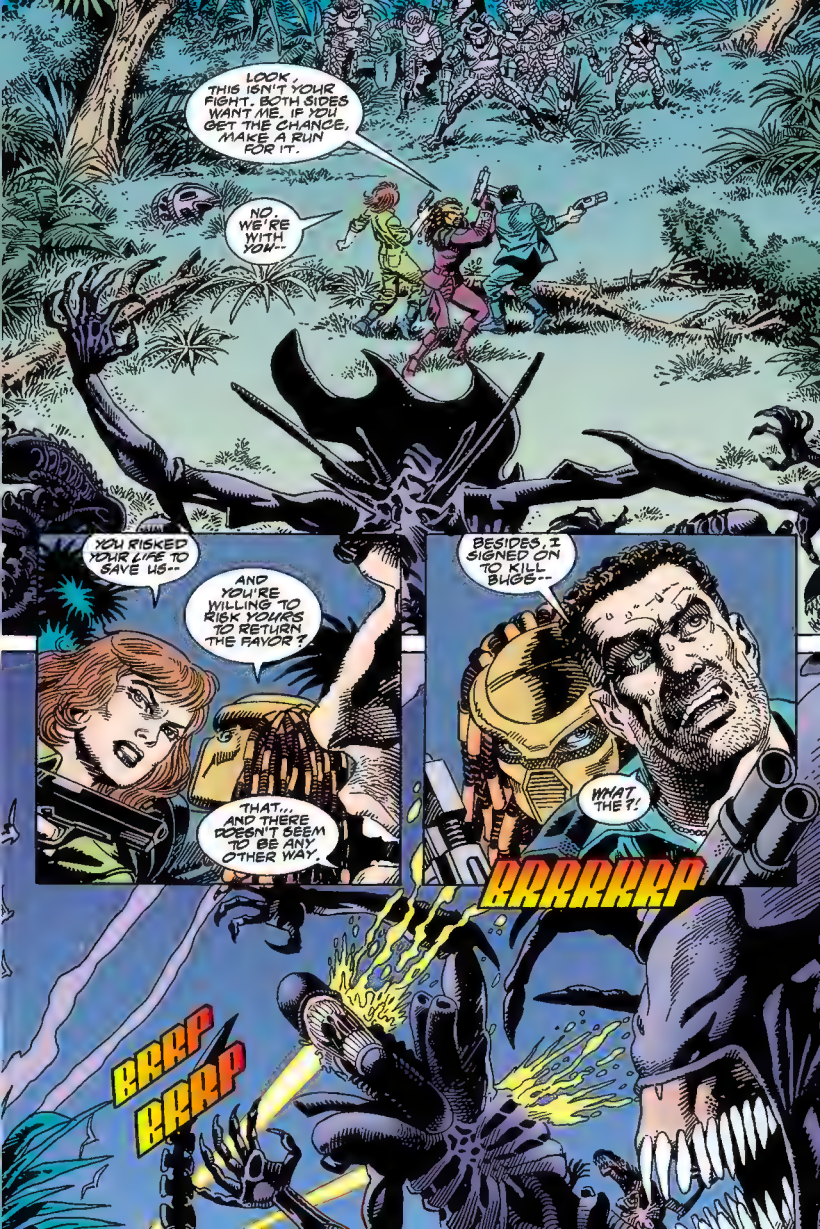

"THERE ARE BUGS ON THIS PLANET.
"THERE WAS EVEN A MOTHER-BUG ON BOARD MY SHIP...
"...BUT I DON'T THINK SHE COULD HAVE SURVIVED THAT LANDING.
"THE HUNTERS SEED WHOLE PLANETS WITH THE BUGS AND HUNT THEM FOR SPORT."

SOME SPORT! I DON'T THINK I WANT TO GO UP AGAINST INVISIBLE CREATURES WHO THINK HUNTING ALIENS IS FUN.
THE WHOLE CULTURE IS BUILT AROUND HUNTING. IT'S REALLY QUITE EXHILARATING WHEN YOU'RE IN IT...
...WHEN YOU'RE ONE OF THE HUNTERS.
AS FOR GOING UP AGAINST THEM--
--IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE WE HAVE A CHOICE.

BOOM
BA-BOOM
BA-BOOM
BLAM
BLAM
FOLLOW ME!
BLAM

CLIK-
CLIK-
CLIK
BACK! GO BACK!
UH-OH...
CH CHIK

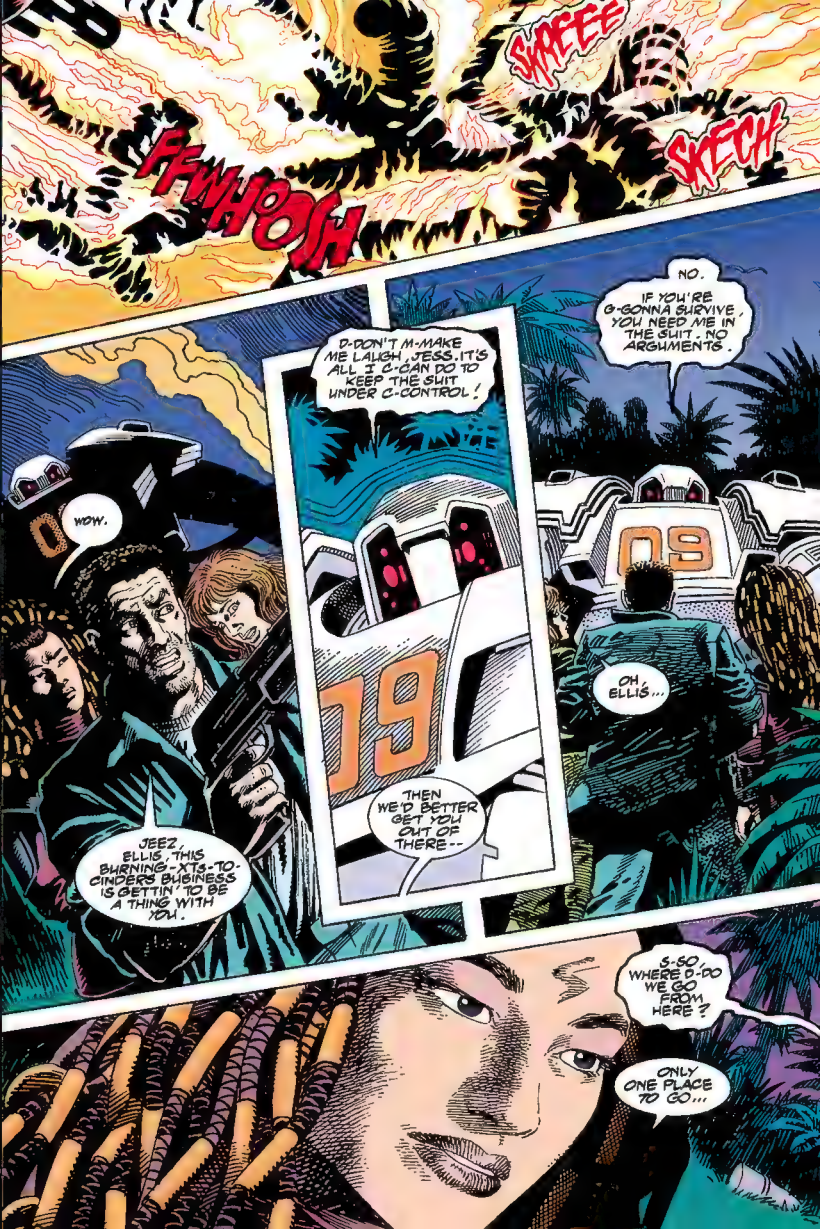
YOU WERE SURE AS HELL RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING, LADY... ...IT'S EXHILARATING.
HRRR!
TOPKNOT. HE KNOWS WHAT I'VE DONE. I'VE BROKEN THE CODE. I'M NOT JUST AN OUTSIDER TO THE CLAN...
...I'M THE CLAN'S WORST ENEMY.
I WAS ALREADY THE QUEEN'S.
KISS

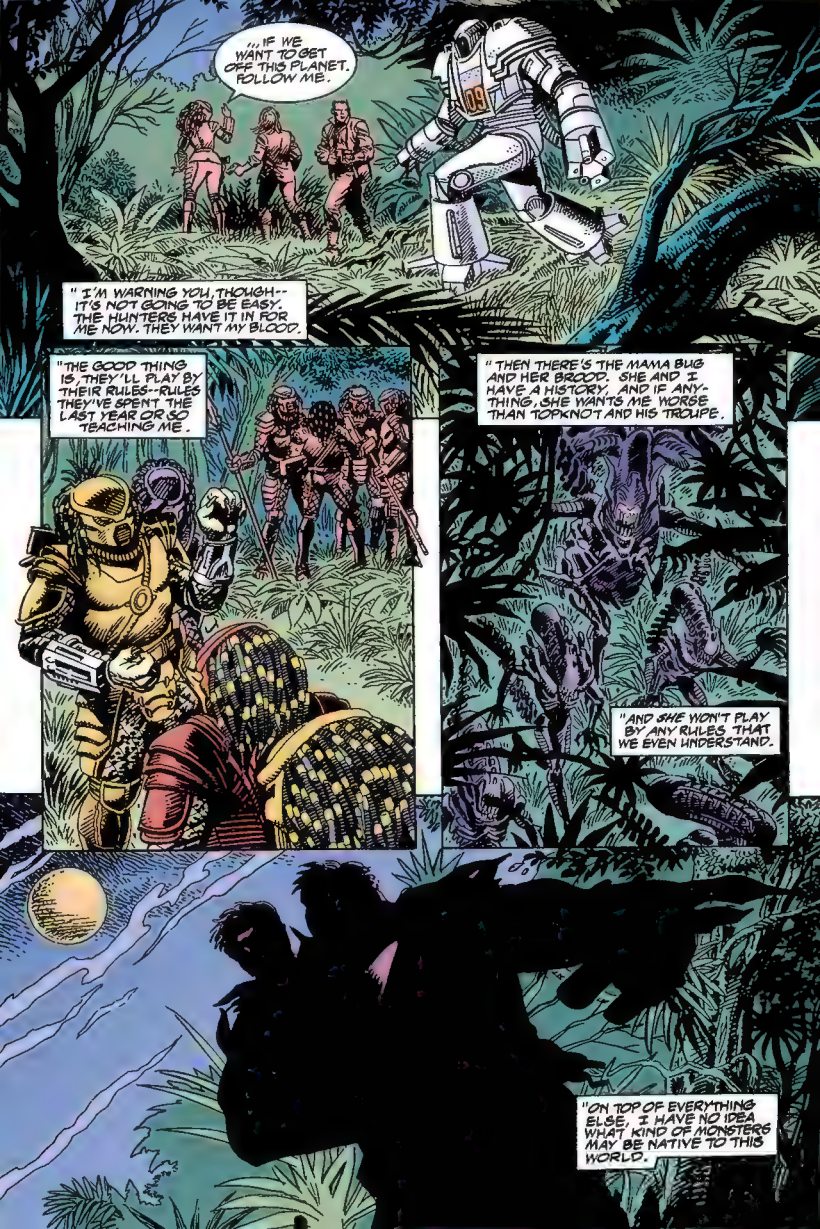

LOOK, THIS ISN'T YOUR FIGHT. BOTH SIDES WANT ME. IF YOU GET THE CHANCE, MAKE A RUN FOR IT.
NO, WE'RE WITH YOU--
YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE TO SAVE US--
AND YOU'RE WILLING TO RISK YOURS TO RETURN THE FAVOR?
THAT... AND THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANY OTHER WAY.
BESIDES, I SIGNED ON TO KILL BUGS--
WHAT THE?!
GRRRRRP
GRRP
GRRP

G-GET OUTTA TH-THERE! LEMME T-TAKE CARE OF THEM!
09
BRRRRRRPP
RUN!
A-A-A-AH! T-TAKE TH-THAT!

K-KILL YOU ALLL!
HE'S REALLY LOST IT. THE FEEDBACK SYSTEM IS FRYING HIS BRAIN.
WE'VE GOT TO HELP HIM!
ARE YOU NUTS? LARA, YOU'LL BE KILLED!
STOP HER!
DAMN! I CAN'T LET HER DO THIS ALONE.
WHAT GOOD CAN YOU DO? THAT ROBOT'S OUT OF CONTROL!
THAT'S NO ROBOT. IT'S MAX. MOBILE ASSAULT EXO-WARRIOR. OUR FRIEND ELLIS-- THE IDIOT-- IS INSIDE.
THE ARMOR WILL MAKE ANYBODY A ONE-PERSON ARMY-- IF THEY'RE WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE.
LOOKS LIKE LARA DID IT. MAYBE THE KID'S NOT AS FAR GONE AS I THOUGHT.
IT'S ALL RIGHT, ELLIS. WE'RE GOING TO GET YOU OUT OF THERE...

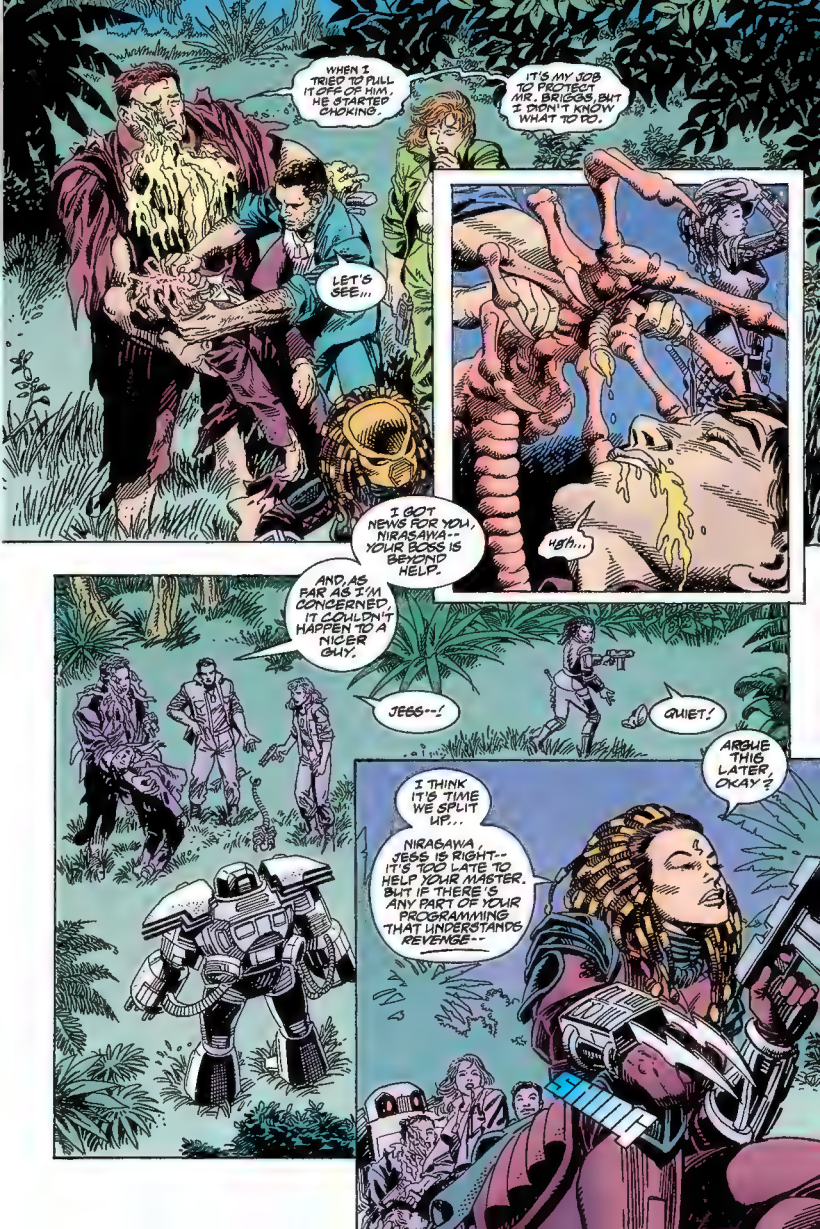
...AND THEN WE'RE ALL GOING HOME.
N-NO!
WHA--?
LARA, GET BACK!
YAAARGH!
FSSS
HHSSS


FFWHOOSH
SKREEE
SKECH
NO.
IF YOU'RE G-GONNA SURVIVE, YOU NEED ME IN THE SUIT. NO ARGUMENTS.
D-DON'T M-MAKE ME LAUGH, JESS. IT'S ALL I C-CAN DO TO KEEP THE SUIT UNDER C-CONTROL!
WOW.
OH, ELLIS...
THEN WE'D BETTER GET YOU OUT OF THERE--
JEEZ, ELLIS, THIS BURNING-XTS-TO-CINDERS BUSINESS IS GETTIN' TO BE A THING WITH YOU.
S-SO, WHERE D-DO WE GO FROM HERE?
ONLY ONE PLACE TO GO...

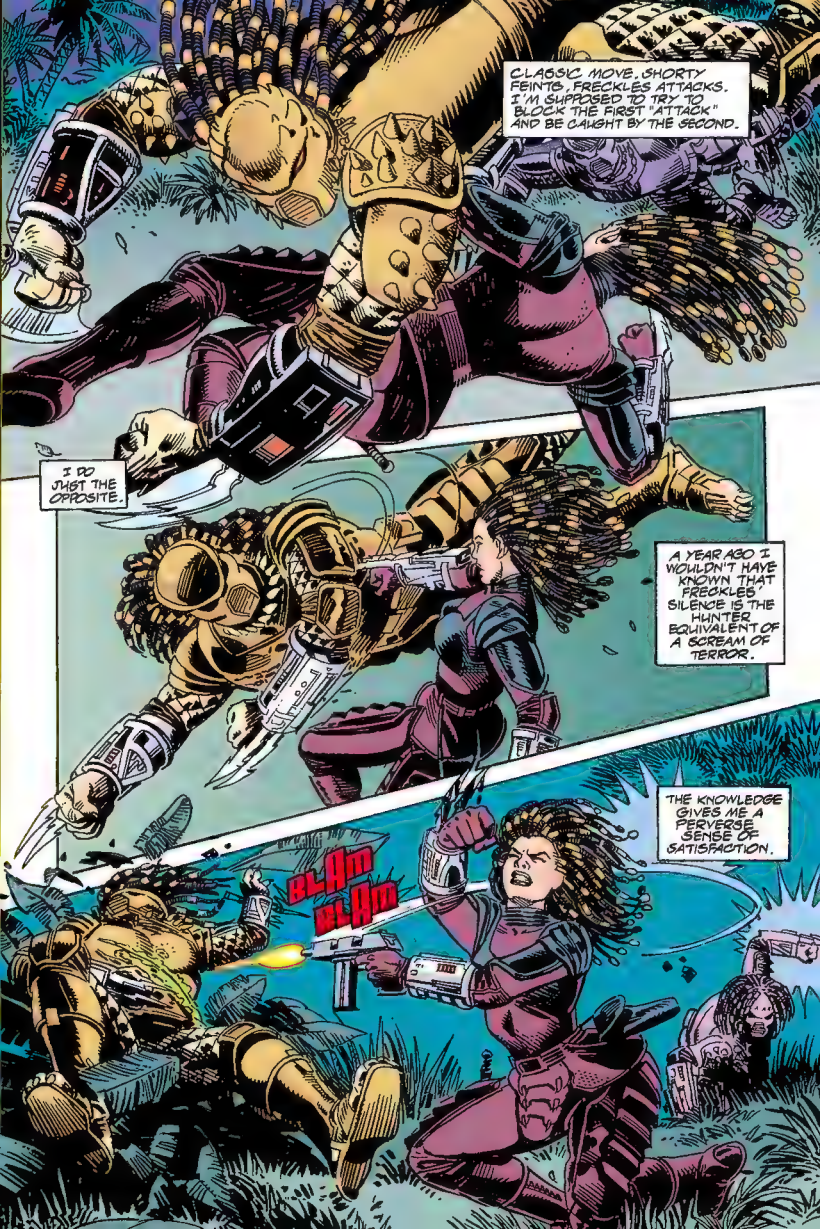

...IF WE WANT TO GET OFF THIS PLANET. FOLLOW ME.
" I'M WARNING YOU, THOUGH-- IT'S NOT GOING TO BE EASY. THE HUNTERS HAVE IT IN FOR ME NOW. THEY WANT MY BLOOD.
"THE GOOD THING IS, THEY'LL PLAY BY THEIR RULES--RULES THEY'VE SPENT THE LAST YEAR OR SO TEACHING ME.
" THEN THERE'S THE MAMA BUG AND HER BROOD. SHE AND I HAVE A HISTORY, AND IF ANYTHING, SHE WANTS ME WORSE THAN TOPKNOT AND HIS TROUPE.
"AND SHE WON'T PLAY BY ANY RULES THAT WE EVEN UNDERSTAND.
"ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE, I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT KIND OF MONSTERS MAY BE NATIVE TO THIS WORLD.

AND JUST WHERE IS IT THAT WE'RE GOING?
09
HMM. GOOD POINT. OKAY, IF WE GET SPLIT UP, HERE'S WHAT YOU DO.
THE HUNTING PARTY ARRIVED IN A SHUTTLE. IT'S JUST A FEW KLICKS DUE SOUTH OF HERE. IT'LL BE IN A CLEARING, AND--
AND WE'RE SUPPOSED TO FLY AN ALIEN SHIP?
YOU TRAINED AS A PILOT?
I AM.
OKAY. THE CONTROLS ARE PRETTY MUCH INTUITIVE--EXCEPT YOU PUSH ON THE COLLECTIVE TO GAIN ALTITUDE AND PULL BACK TO DESCEND.
I CAN'T EXPLAIN THE NAVIGATION WITHOUT SHOWING IT TO YOU, BUT YOU CAN AT LEAST GET A SAFE DISTANCE AWAY.
I GOT A BETTER IDEA--LET'S NOT SPLIT UP.
09
SOMEBODY'S COMING!

GET READY...
KRUNCH
09
WHAT IS IT, JESS?
WORRY ABOUT THAT AFTER IT'S DEAD, LARA!
NO, DON'T SHOOT!
HIRASAWA!
AND BRIGGS!
SO, HIRASAWA. YOU'RE AN ANDROID. I SHOULD'VE FIGURED, THE WAY YOU HANDLED ME.
PLEASE... YOU MUST HELP MR. BRIGGS.
OH, MY GOD! HE'S BEEN FACE-HUGGED!


WHEN I TRIED TO PULL IT OFF OF HIM, HE STARTED CHOKING.
IT'S MY JOB TO PROTECT MR. BRIGGS, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.
LET'S SEE...
UGH...
I GOT NEWS FOR YOU, NIRASAWA-- YOUR BOSS IS BEYOND HELP.
AND, AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, IT COULDN'T HAPPEN TO A NICER GUY.
JESS--!
QUIET!
ARGUE THIS LATER, OKAY?
I THINK IT'S TIME WE SPLIT UP...
NIRASAWA, JESS IS RIGHT-- IT'S TOO LATE TO HELP YOUR MASTER. BUT IF THERE'S ANY PART OF YOUR PROGRAMMING THAT UNDERSTANDS REVENGE--
SHIIIIT

--NOW'S THE TIME TO ACCESS IT...
...BECAUSE THESE ARE THE GUYS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS CONDITION.
THE REST OF YOU, TAKE OFF--LIKE WE DISCUSSED.
THIS IS PERSONAL.


CLASSIC MOVE. SHORTY FEINTS, FRECKLES ATTACKS. I'M SUPPOSED TO TRY TO BLOCK THE FIRST "ATTACK" AND BE CAUGHT BY THE SECOND.
I DO JUST THE OPPOSITE.
A YEAR AGO I WOULDN'T HAVE KNOWN THAT FRECKLES' SILENCE IS THE HUNTER EQUIVALENT OF A SCREAM OF TERROR.
THE KNOWLEDGE GIVES ME A PERVERSE SENSE OF SATISFACTION.
BLAM
BLAM

IT'S JUST YOU AND ME, SHORTY... FOR THE LAST TIME.
W-WE'D B-BETTER GO.
NO ARGUMENT HERE. GIVE ME A HAND.
WHAT'RE YOU DOING? YOU SAID YOURSELF THAT BRIGGS WAS BEYOND HELP!
WE CAN'T HELP HIM, BUT MAYBE HE CAN HELP US. I'LL EXPLAIN WHEN WE GET AWAY FROM HERE.
SKRINK
HAH!
Uh... Whuh...

KAK
WHAT'S THE MATTER, SHORTY?
NOT SO TOUGH WITHOUT SOMEBODY TO BACK YOU UP? YOU'RE NOT A HUNTER. YOU'RE JUST A BULLY.
LUSH
I'M MORE OF A HUNTER THAN YOU.
SLAK
<HUMAN...>
I KNEW YOU COULD UNDERSTAND ME. GOOD.
I MAY BE HUMAN, BUT I'M ALSO HUNTER. AND EVEN THOUGH THE HUMAN SIDE OF ME SAYS IT'S WRONG TO KILL YOU...

...THE HUNTER SIDE KNOWS IT'S THE ONLY SMART THING TO DO!
SHKK
DAMN!
INTUITIVE? INTUITIVE MY--

IT'S ALL RIGHT, I'M HERE. I'LL FLY IT.
OH! YOU MADE IT! I DIDN'T HEAR YOU--
YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO. IS THAT ELLIS?
YEAH. HE'S IN BAD SHAPE. THIS IS THE SECOND TIME HE'S SAVED US BY GETTING INTO THAT SUIT.
I HOPE HE'S GOING TO BE OKAY.
WHERE'S JESS?
HE SHOULD BE BACK SOON. HE WENT TO--
WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! TOPKNOT AND HIS "BOYS" WILL BE HEADING THIS WAY...
...NOT TO MENTION THE BUGS!
YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN, SISTER! GET THIS SHIP AIRBORNE!
ONE SECOND...
BRRRPP-BRRPP
WHAT'S THAT--? YOU'RE ALL HERE... WHO'S SHOOTING?
THAT?

THAT WOULD BE BRIGGS... IN THE MAX ARMOR. I THOUGHT HE SHOULD DO SOME GOOD WITH WHAT LITTLE TIME HE HAS LEFT.
SO, WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
HOME, OF COURSE.
HOME...
...SOMEPLACE I HAVEN'T BEEN, YET.
THE END.